

Understanding Eye Health and Vision Care

Regular eye exams are important to ensure your eyes are healthy, even if you feel and see well. Many eye diseases do not have symptoms at their onset, so a comprehensive eye exam is the only way to identify them early.

Primary Eye Care Providers

- [Optometrists](#) offer comprehensive eye exams to evaluate and treat common eye disorders and diseases, assess the clarity of your vision, and prescribe corrective lenses.
- [Ophthalmologists](#) also provide complete eye care, including comprehensive eye exams, corrective lens prescriptions, sub-specialty care, treatment of complex eye diseases, and surgery of the eye and its surrounding structures.



Getting your eyes checked regularly could save your sight.

In addition, there are other eye care professionals that may be able to support your eye health and vision needs. For example, [opticians](#) make and supply corrective lenses (e.g., glasses and contact lenses) and [vision rehabilitation specialists](#) support individuals that are visually impaired.

Comprehensive Eye Exams

During a [comprehensive eye exam](#), your doctor will conduct a number of tests to check the clarity of your vision, eye muscle function, peripheral (side) vision, pupillary response, external and internal eye health, and eye pressure. These tests help your doctor determine your overall eye health and if you have signs of eye problems such as [refractive error](#) (e.g., nearsightedness or farsightedness), eye disease, or a vision disorder.

Your doctor will also perform an examination to look at the eye structures. This exam typically includes a [dilated eye exam](#), in which the doctor uses eye drops to widen your [pupil](#) to get a clearer view of the inside of the eye to check for signs of disease.

It is important to get eye exams throughout your life.

- A child's vision will be examined as a newborn and monitored for healthy eye development during well-child examination visits until age 6 years, and then checked periodically through adolescence.
- Adults with no prior vision problems are recommended to get a comprehensive exam every 5 to 10 years during their 20s and 30s.
- All adults are recommended to get a comprehensive eye exam at age 40, when age-related vision changes are more likely to start.

Some individuals may need a comprehensive eye exam more frequently. Individuals who have increased risk for developing eye disease may need regular check-ups as often as every 1 or 2 years.

Characteristics that may increase risk for eye disease:

- Age – over 60 years old
- Race/Ethnicity – African American or Hispanic
- Family history of glaucoma or certain retinal diseases
- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- Taking medications that have ocular side effects
- Current smoker

Lifestyle factors may also affect eye health and risk for eye disease. See the [Wellness Tips for Eye Health](#) section of the SWHR Guide to Women's Eye Health.

Eye Health Across the Lifespan

Increased risks for certain eye conditions are a natural part of aging, however, **vision loss should not be considered a natural part of aging**. Parts of the eye may slowly become damaged or less functional over time, resulting in common eye diseases, such as [age-related macular degeneration](#), [glaucoma](#), and [cataracts](#).

As the life expectancy increases for women, these conditions tend to have higher incidence among women compared to men. Many common eye diseases progress gradually over time and may not have symptoms right away. It is important to have regular eye exams as you get older to make sure your doctor has a chance to see early signs of eye damage or disease. Often, when caught early, eye conditions can be significantly delayed or prevented entirely. Once you have an early diagnosis, it is important to talk to your doctor about strategies to treat symptoms and promote your eye health in the long term.

