

Eye Care Corner

Six Ways a Simple Eye Exam Could Save Your Life

(NAPS)—It may come as a surprise to some, but an ophthalmologist can help you keep an eye on your overall health. In fact, an ophthalmologist—a physician who specializes in medical and surgical eye care—may be the first to detect if you're at risk for a heart attack, stroke or other life-threatening conditions. That's because subtle, early damage to tiny blood vessels in the eyes can provide important clues about what is happening in the small blood vessels of the brain and heart.

The American Academy of Ophthalmology recommends all adults receive a comprehensive eye exam by age 40, and every year or two after age 65.

Surprising medical conditions that can be detected in a routine eye exam:

1. Cancer. This includes not only eye-related skin cancers on the eyelid or the surface of the eye, but also cancers in other parts of the body. Leukemia, lymphoma, and breast cancer can all be detected in the eye.

2. Diabetes. Diabetes is a leading cause of vision loss in the United States, but signs of diabetes can also appear in the eye before vision is affected. When a person with diabetes has high blood sugar levels, it can affect the blood vessels in the eye. That's how an ophthalmologist might diagnose diabetes before other symptoms appear.

3. Heart disease. During a routine eye exam, ophthalmologists use a special imaging tool to examine the retina, the light-sensitive tissue at the back of the eye. If the blood supply to the retina is reduced or blocked, this could be an early symptom of heart disease.

4. High blood pressure. One in three American adults has high blood pressure, which can lead to heart disease if left untreated. Unusually shaped blood vessels or bleeding in the back of the eye can signal high blood pressure.



Regular checkups by an ophthalmologist can help you see your way to good health.

5. High cholesterol. Another common health condition that can lead to serious health issues is high cholesterol. A yellow or blue ring around the cornea can be a symptom, as can deposits in the blood vessels of the retina.

6. Stroke. An ophthalmologist can also spot plaque deposits in the arteries of the eye. If these pieces of plaque reach the brain, they can cause a stroke. Several eye symptoms are linked to stroke, such as loss of side vision, sudden blind spots, blurry vision, double vision, or sensitivity to light. People experiencing these symptoms should seek immediate medical attention.

Can't Afford an Eye Exam? Eye-Care America® Can Help.

Individuals age 65 or older who are concerned about their risk of eye disease and/or the cost of an eye exam, may be eligible for a medical eye exam, often at no out-of-pocket cost, through the American Academy of Ophthalmology's EyeCare America® program. This public service program matches volunteer ophthalmologists with eligible patients in need of eye care across the United States. To see if you or a loved one qualifies, visit www.aao.org/eyecare-america to determine your eligibility.