



Healthy Eyes are the  
Essence of a Healthy Life.

# Eye Disease Management

*With life expectancy figures continuing to climb, managing eye disease is essential for people to maintain healthy, happy and productive lives. By performing a comprehensive eye exam, a doctor of optometry can successfully detect the diseases listed below and treat them in conjunction with other health care providers.*

**Age-Related Macular Degeneration (AMD)**, the leading cause of blindness in the United States, is caused by deterioration of certain cells in the macula, a portion of the retina located at the back of the eye that is responsible for clear, sharp vision.

**Symptoms:** A painless and gradual loss of ability to see objects clearly, distorted vision, a gradual loss of color vision and a dark or empty area appearing in the center of vision.

**Cause:** Not certain, but could be attributed to lack of certain vitamins and minerals to the retina; circulation breakdown to the retina; excessive levels of cholesterol or sugar in the diet; hypertension; excessive exposure to ultraviolet light; and heredity.

**At High Risk:** AMD is high among Caucasians ages 65 to 74 (*11 percent*); women tend to get the disease more than men.

**Cataracts**, caused by chemical changes in the lens, will cloud all or part of the normally clear lens within the eye. Cataracts are the leading cause of vision loss.

**Symptoms:** Blurred or hazy vision; appearance of spots in front of the eyes; increased sensitivity to glare or the feeling of having a film over the eyes.

**What You Can Do:** Avoid smoking and over-exposure to sunlight. Cigarettes and ultraviolet (UV) light produce free radicals and may play a role in cataract development, according to researchers at the Mayo Clinic.

**Good News:** More than 95 percent of people who have cataracts removed end up with better vision.

**At High Risk:** About half of Americans between the ages of 65 and 75 have cataracts to some degree.

**Diabetic Retinopathy** can weaken and cause changes in the small blood vessels that nourish the eyes of people with diabetes.

**Symptoms:** Early stages of diabetic retinopathy may cause blurred vision or may produce no visual symptoms at all. As the disease progresses, individuals may experience cloudiness of vision, blind spots, or floaters.

**What You Can Do:** Monitor diabetes through diet and exercise under a doctor's supervision. Inform your doctor of optometry that you have diabetes and schedule an annual dilated eye examination to detect changes in the retina or optic nerve.

**Good News:** Early diagnosis and timely treatment have been proven to prevent vision loss in more than 90 percent of patients. However, an estimated 50 percent of patients are diagnosed too late for effective treatment.

**At High Risk:** African-Americans are 1.7 times more likely to have diabetes than Caucasians, according to the American Diabetes Association.

**Glaucoma**, one of the leading causes of blindness in the United States, is the result of a build-up of pressure in the eye, resulting in damage to the nerve fibers, optic nerve, and blood vessels in the eye.

**Cause:** The most common type of glaucoma develops without symptoms, gradually and painlessly. A rare form occurs rapidly and its symptoms may include blurred vision, loss of side vision, seeing colored rings around lights and pain or redness in the eyes.

**What You Can Do:** Individuals over 40 or those who have a family history of glaucoma should schedule an annual comprehensive eye examination.

**Good News:** If detected early, glaucoma can be controlled. However, at least half of the people who have glaucoma are not receiving treatment because they are unaware of their condition. If glaucoma is not detected, it can lead to permanent vision loss.

**At High Risk:** Glaucoma is the number one cause of vision loss in African-Americans.

*U.S. Health and Human Services Department and MayoClinic.com provided some of this information.*



American Optometric  
Association

March is National Save Your Vision Month.  
[www.aoa.org](http://www.aoa.org)