



Seeing the Way to Better Health: *Women's Health and Vision Health*

Women comprise two-thirds of the world's visually impaired population. Throughout a woman's lifespan, she can experience vision and eye health changes at all stages of life—puberty, pregnancy, menopause, and older adult.

Women are disproportionately affected by nearly all major vision and eye disorders, especially those associated with aging. Women tend to live longer than men and are less likely to access eye care.¹ Women of lower socioeconomic status, lower educational attainment, or those living in rural areas experience increased barriers to eye care services.²



PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT:

Prevent Blindness Texas (PBT) integrated vision and eye health activities with a women's health program providing free cervical and breast cancer screening events for uninsured or underinsured women age 21 and older in the greater Houston area. These community outreach events were held at local health department multi-service centers and community health clinics. PBT helped to improve access to vision and eye health services by providing vision screenings, vision and eye health education, and eye care resources to the program participants as they waited for their health exams. The partner program found the integration of vision and eye health activities beneficial to the overall health of the women they served.

Approximately **6 out of every 10** people with the following conditions are women:³

- Age-related macular degeneration (AMD)
- Glaucoma
- Vision impairment
- Cataract
- Blindness
- Refractive error



Women may experience vision changes during pregnancy, with some continuing during lactation. Expectant mothers need to be aware of these potential vision and eye health problems, continue to receive regular eye care, and discuss any vision changes with their eye doctors.

Women are also more prone to other eye-related problems as they age. These problems include dry eye, which is a symptom of menopause and of autoimmune diseases like Sjogren's syndrome, lupus, and rheumatoid arthritis. All these conditions are more common in women.⁴ Vision impairment in older adults also increases the risk for falls, social isolation, and reduced quality of life.⁵



Awareness and Action: Women can help protect their vision and eye health by following a healthy diet, exercising regularly, and not smoking. It is important for women to learn about any family history of eye diseases as some may increase their risk of disease. It is also critical to seek treatment early for any conditions that can lead to vision impairment and receive follow-up care.

INTEGRATING vision and eye health strategies into other programs and activities can help improve the quality of life for women.

WOMEN'S HEALTH CAMPAIGNS:



Integrate messaging about vision and eye health into programs that promote women's health to diverse

populations, including populations at high risk and minority populations. Prevention and eye safety messaging can be integrated into existing health promotion programs and awareness campaigns.

HEALTHY AGING PROGRAMS:



Integrate vision screening and early detection activities, improve access to

and use of eye care services, and incorporate eye health awareness messages into programs that promote healthy and active aging.

CAREGIVER SUPPORT PROGRAMS:



Support caregivers by providing them with vision and eye health resources.

These resources should include measures to prevent vision loss by receiving recommended eye care services. They should also include contact information for low vision rehabilitation programs to assist those with uncorrectable vision impairment.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES:



Include information about the benefits of early detection and treatment for

vision and eye health problems. These include age-related macular degeneration, cataracts, glaucoma, and refractive errors in training programs for professionals who promote women's health.

RESOURCES:

Building Public Health Capacity to Enhance Vision and Eye Health: A Toolkit for Public Health Agencies and Their Partners

This toolkit can help public health agencies and their partners assess the level of vision impairment in their communities, build effective partnerships, and implement effective and sustainable interventions to improve vision and eye health.

www.cdc.gov/visionhealth/programs/vision-eye-health-tool.html

Healthy Eyes Presentation Series

This presentation series can create awareness about vision and eye health basics, common adult vision disorders, eye safety precautions, and proactive behaviors for a lifetime of healthy vision. In addition, there are disease-specific toolkits on the Prevent Blindness website.

<https://preventblindness.org/health-eyes-presentation-series/>

Living Well with Low Vision

This online resource educates those with loss of vision on how to maintain their independence and quality of life.

<https://lowvision.preventblindness.org/>

Resources for Health Educators

These toolkits offer disease- and audience-specific programs for health educators.

www.nei.nih.gov/learn-about-eye-health/resources-for-health-educators

Vision and Eye Health Surveillance System (VEHSS): A National Data System for Vision and Eye Health

Get the latest state and national data on vision and eye health.

www.cdc.gov/visionhealth/vehss/index.html

Pregnancy and Your Vision

This webpage provides information on the effects of pregnancy on vision.

<https://preventblindness.org/pregnancy-and-your-vision/>

Eye Diseases and Conditions

This resource provides links to information on a wide range of eye diseases and eye problems in adults and children.

<https://preventblindness.org/eye-problems-adults-children/>

Nutrition and Eye Health

This link provides information about diet, nutrition, and eye health.

www.aao.org/eye-health/tips-prevention/diet-nutrition

For more information, go to:

www.preventblindness.org

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