



The Importance of a Comprehensive Eye Exam

This year in the US over 10 Million people will be diagnosed with Glaucoma, 15 Million with Age Related Macular Degeneration, 25 Million with cataracts and millions more with Diabetic retinopathy and other sight threatening conditions. The underlying theme with most of these diseases is that they are not curable and not reversible so the objective in saving the sight of these millions of Americans rests solely on early detection and treatment. Most of these conditions are manageable if they are caught early and can be treated with medication, in-office procedure, surgery and sometimes with diet or supplements.

The Silent, Symptomless Disease

You can't "feel" glaucoma, yet it results in blindness 100% of the time if not treated. AMD, retinopathy, even cataracts to some extent are the silent diseases because they don't manifest themselves with a host of symptoms. Cataracts is when the lens in the eye becomes cloudy or foggy over time, mostly due to UV exposure, making it difficult to see or blurry. The other conditions don't have a noticeable affect in your sight until it's way too late. This is precisely why the American Optometric Association, the American Academy of Ophthalmology and the American Medical Association recommend annual comprehensive eye exams. An eye exam isn't merely a refraction to get an eyeglass prescription, in fact it isn't that at all. An eye exam consists of 14 steps to evaluate the overall health of the eye, the refractive anatomy as well as the veins and vessels that connect the eye to the brain. An Optometrist can diagnose diabetes, hypertension, even auto-immune diseases such as Lupus in the course of a dilated eye exam. Brain tumors, cancer, migraines and strokes are not uncommon in the chair of an Opticare optometrist.

An Eye Exam Saves Lives

Here's the story of Brielle (or "B" as she is known). She was a normal 11 year old girl that was experiencing some odd visual issues at school. She didn't say anything to her mother or her teacher about it until one day her mother noticed B straining to see the stairs in her house and noticed the B was audibly counting stairs, a common behavior of blind people to remember the number of stairs for future trips up and down the stairway.

Finally B told her mother that she was having a hard time seeing, especially in her periphery, so her mother took her to an eye doctor in the mall and an exam was performed. The Doctor gave her an eyeglass prescription and they made a pair of glasses.

Brielle wore her glasses religiously but it didn't help the issue. She was still having trouble seeing and it was getting worse. After spending nearly \$500 for the exam and glasses, B's mom remembered that at her new job she has vision insurance for the first time. This time she will visit an Opticare provider in Holladay, UT. During this visit the Optometrist noticed something concerning that needed to be sent to a specialist immediately. "We were no longer worried about fixing Brielle's vision, we were focused on saving her life," explained the Optometrist. Brielle was diagnosed with Craniopharyngioma, a non-cancerous brain tumor that was putting pressure on her pituitary gland as well as her optic nerve – the nerve that sends light impulses from the eye to the brain. She was in emergency surgery to have the tumor removed less than 24 hours from the time of her eye exam. Today B is a happy and healthy teenager and even though she lost vision in her right eye, she is a healthy young woman thanks to her visit to the eye doctor. "Words can not express how lucky I feel to have had an Opticare Vision Plan at that moment. Because Brielle wasn't severely complaining and I had just spent almost \$500 on glasses for her, I would have postponed that secondary visit but since the exam at Standard Optical was only a \$10 co-pay, it made sense to get her in right away. Never in my wildest dreams would have expected that we would have been preparing for brain surgery mere hours later." – Brielle's mom.



Vision Screening vs Comprehensive Exam

“My child gets his/her eyes examined every year by the school nurse.” WRONG. The school nurse will perform what’s called an acuity test using a Snellen Chart (the one with the big E). This is nothing more than a check to see how well someone can see. It doesn’t not address the optics or health of the eye, nor does it generate an eyeglass prescription. It may identify which children need a full eye exam and often is accompanied by a note home to mom and dad. Utah is one of only a few states that doesn’t require an eye exam before going into school for kids and because of that, Utah has some glaring vision related issues. First, studies show that over 20% of ADD/ADHD diagnoses are mid-diagnosed due to poor eyesight. In basic terms, little Johnny doesn’t have a problem concentrating, he just can’t see the board. This combined with a startling statistic of nearly 1 in 4 school-aged kids have an undiagnosed visual disorder. Other alarming data points – nearly 60% of convicted juvenile delinquents have an untreated vision condition. Kids that have untreated vision issues routinely finish with lower GPA than those with good or corrected vision.

Eye Exams and Cardiovascular Health

An eye exam is the only non-invasive way for a physician to see the blood vessels in action. Hypertension is easily visible during an eye exam and is the leading cause of heart attack and stroke. A recent study showed that an Optometric practice will have upwards of 20% of their patient base with elevated blood pressure and if those, 66% were unaware that they had high blood pressure. Since Opticare Optometrists have therapeutic and controlled substance licensure, it is within the scope of their license to write a prescription for blood pressure medication, however, a referral to the patient’s primary care provider is typical. In many cases, the eye exam is the initial diagnosis of conditions that could cause life threatening problems later in life.

While America struggles to control healthcare expenses and patients continue to only visit physicians when they exhibit symptoms, and eye exam proves to be a low cost, well-care exam that can give you a look into the entire health system. Data would suggest that if everyone were to get annual eye exams, the healthcare system in the US could save, via early detection and treatment, billions of dollars each year and extend the lives of our fellow Americans.

Recommended Eye Examination Frequency for Pediatric Patients and Adults

Recommended examination frequency for the pediatric patient

Patient Age	Examination Interval	
	Asymptomatic/Low Risk	At Risk
Birth to 2 years	At 6 to 12 months of age	At 6 to 12 months of age or as recommended
3 through 5 years	At least once between 3 and 5 years of age	At least once between 3 and 5 years of age or as recommended
6 through 17 years	Before first grade and annually thereafter	Before first grade and annually, or as recommended thereafter

Recommended examination frequency for the adult patient

Patient Age (Years)	Examination Interval	
	Asymptomatic/Low Risk	At Risk
18 through 39	At least every 2 yaers	At least annually, or as recommended
40 through 64	At least every 2 yaers	At least annually, or as recommended
65 and older	Annually	At least annually, or as recommended

Patients at risk include those:

- A personal or family history of ocular disease
- Belonging to certain racial and ethnic groups
- Systemic health conditions with potential ocular manifestations
- Occupations that are highly demanding visually or have a high potential of being hazardous to the eyes
- Taking prescription or nonprescription drugs with ocular side effects
- Having functional vision in only one eye
- Wearing contact lenses
- Eye surgery or previous eye injury
- High or progressive refractive error
- Other eye-related health concerns or conditions