



Aging, Eyesight and Independence

While all five senses change with age, one of the most noticeable changes is to our vision. For many people, “middle age” is synonymous with reading glasses. This is a time when people come to realize just how small the fine print really is. While reading glasses can be a nuisance and even an embarrassment for some, they are a fact of life for many people. With age, more and more people rely on glasses, bifocals or trifocals to help maintain their eyesight as significant changes to vision make it more difficult to go about their daily activities.

As we age, the pupil of the eye becomes less responsive to sudden changes in lighting. As a result, finding a seat in a theatre after a show has started may require patience as it takes time for eyes to adjust. Likewise, the glare of headlights from on-coming traffic can make night-time driving difficult. Other common age-related changes include the loss in visual acuity, which is the ability to notice detail, and a gradual thickening and yellowing of the lens of the eye.

Annual vision screenings become increasingly important as people reach their 40s, 50s and 60s. As with most health issues, identifying problems and/or potential concerns may enable people to take corrective action before a condition becomes debilitating.

Of the many eye diseases that affect older adults, the most common are cataracts, diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma and macular degeneration. A brief description of each follows:

- **Cataracts** are a gradual clouding of the lens of the eye, making images less clear and sharp.
- **Diabetic retinopathy** is caused by a lack of circulation to the retina where the arteries in the retina become weakened and leak, forming small spots that cloud a person’s vision.
- **Glaucoma** is a buildup of pressure inside the eye that ultimately can destroy the optic nerve and lead to blindness.
- **Macular degeneration** has to do with the deterioration of a portion of the retina responsible for focusing central vision in the eye making it difficult to read and recognize detail.

Medical treatment or surgery may be an option for many conditions. There may also be lifestyle changes people can make to minimize the effect of vision changes. For example, if someone has difficulty seeing at night, hold activities earlier in the day and take advantage of lower prices at movie matinees and early bird dinner specials.

Like so many health-related issues, it isn't until we personally experience a limitation that we can begin to truly understand the challenges people with deteriorating vision encounter. While using glasses or contacts can be a quick and simple fix early on, vision changes and limitations can begin to steal one's independence as they age.

When vision changes start to interfere with one's quality of life, seeking support with daily living activities can make a tremendous difference and enable people to remain as independent as possible. At Home Helpers, many of our clients are limited in their abilities due to vision changes. Whether providing transportation to and from appointments and errands, or simply reading the newspaper aloud, we offer the support and encouragement people need and deserve. We can also help with various tasks around the house, including light housekeeping, meal preparation and laundry. At Home Helpers, we recognize that it is important to help people maintain their dignity in a respectful manner.

To learn more about age-related vision changes, we suggest the following organizations/websites:

- American Foundation for the Blind – www.afb.org
- American Optometric Association – www.aoa.org
- National Institute of Health | Senior Health – *Aging And Your Eyes* – www.nia.nih.gov/HealthInformation/Publications/eyes.htm
- Mayo Clinic – *Vision problems as you age* – www.mayoclinic.com/health/vision-problems/HA00061

HOME HELPERS – *Making Life Easier* Home Helpers offers quality non-medical and personal care* and companionship services similar to the care and support often provided by family members. Our flexible care plans are tailored to fit our clients' specific needs and budgets. Compassionate Care is a bi-monthly newsletter produced by Home Helpers. We hope you found this edition to be informative and helpful.

Home Helpers

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