



To Your Health

Information You Can Use

Taking Care of Your Eyes and Ears

Eyesight and hearing are probably the most important of our five senses, but they are often taken for granted. For example, while many people take the time for regular dental appointments, they may forget about seeing an eye doctor for a vision screening. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately 14 million Americans aged 12 and older suffer from impaired sight, and more than 80% of those could be corrected to good vision.

Unless you are experiencing problems with your hearing, you may not have had an actual hearing test. You may also not be aware of the way your hearing is threatened by regular exposure to loud noise.

Vision and hearing add so much to our quality of life. Be sensible in protecting your senses!



Look Out



While it's a good idea to have at least one comprehensive eye exam by age 40, you should also see a doctor if you experience one or several of the following symptoms (especially if they begin suddenly):

- 👁️ Burning or itching
- 👁️ Redness in the white of the eye or inner eyelid
- 👁️ Thick discharge that may crust over the eyelashes
- 👁️ Blurry or cloudy vision
- 👁️ Gradual dimming or sudden loss of central vision
- 👁️ Double vision
- 👁️ Seeing "floaters" or spots
- 👁️ Seeing a "halo" effect around lights
- 👁️ Problems in seeing things up close or in the distance
- 👁️ Difficulty focusing

In many cases, nothing may be seriously wrong. Perhaps you need glasses (or a change in your prescription). You could be suffering from a minor eye ailment like "pink eye," which usually clears up on its own (but antibiotics can help).

However, several of these symptoms may point toward a more serious health condition, such as a *cataract*, where the eye's clear lens becomes cloudy, or *glaucoma*, where increasing fluid pressure inside the eye damages the optic nerve, which can result in blindness. *Age-related macular degeneration* will eventually destroy your vision if treatment doesn't begin in time.

Some of the very worst eye conditions cause no pain, and by the time symptoms appear, the disease may have rapidly progressed. This is why it's so important to see an eye doctor at least every few years (or more often, if you are diabetic), to make certain your eyes are truly healthy.

Listen Up

Unlike some serious eye conditions, problems with your ears are likely to have more obvious symptoms. You may gradually or suddenly find you cannot hear well or clearly, or there is a ringing or buzzing in your ears. You could also experience some degree of pain.

Ear pain and hearing loss can be caused by a variety of reasons. "Swimmer's ear" or other ear infections can cause pain and itchiness, and are not uncommon in young children. Ringing in your ears could be due to exposure to noise, such as when you listen to loud music through earphones. Even an abundance of earwax may lead to discomfort and temporary hearing loss.

If you are in pain or suffering from hearing difficulties that last even a few days, don't hesitate to call your doctor. Your doctor can prescribe antibiotics in the event of an infection, or remove earwax as needed. If you still have difficulty hearing well, you may be referred to an *audiologist*, a specialist in identifying and treating auditory disorders, for a hearing test.



Sound and Vision—Protecting Your Senses

When it comes to staying healthy, your eyes are no different than the rest of your body. Protect your vision (and the rest of you!) by taking these steps:

- 1) Don't smoke
- 2) Limit alcohol use
- 3) Eat a healthy diet, especially a lot of leafy greens
- 4) Exercise regularly
- 5) Maintain a healthy body weight
- 6) Keep both your blood pressure and your blood sugar in a normal range



In addition, it's critical that you shield your eyes from sunlight. For example, regular exposure to the ultraviolet light in sunshine can cause cataracts.

When you are outdoors, remember to put on a pair of sunglasses that blocks both UVA and UVB rays.

Remember to protect your eyes at home and at work, and while engaging in sports activities. The majority of eye injuries are preventable if you take a few easy, common-sense precautions. For example, consider putting on protective headgear that shields your face and eyes when playing baseball, football and hockey. Invest in a pair of swim goggles for the pool.



At home, wear special safety glasses with side shields when you use strong chemicals or are working on home repairs or motorized equipment. (Safety glasses, made of hard plastic, can be found at many home building stores and optical centers. You don't need a prescription to purchase them, although you can get prescription safety glasses if necessary.)

Did you know that noise can permanently damage your ears? While some sounds, such as a loud explosion, may cause immediate deafness, most noise-related damage will create gradual hearing loss over time.

Noise-related hearing loss can occur if you are exposed to dangerous levels of sound for extended periods of time. The loudness of sound is measured in *decibels*. The higher the decibel level of a certain sound, the less time you should be exposed to it without wearing protective ear plugs or earmuffs. The chart below shows the decibel level of various sounds and the maximum daily exposure limits, as defined by the Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA).

Maximum Daily Exposure Per OSHA	Sound Level	Decibel Level	Examples
No Specific Limit	Very Quiet to Quiet	40-60	Suburban Street Without Traffic Normal Conversation Sewing Machine
No Specific Limit	Annoying to Loud	70-80	Freeway Traffic Noisy Restaurant Vacuum Cleaner Dishwasher
From Two to Eight Hours (Depending on Specific Sound)	Loud to Very Loud	90-100	Power Drill Busy Urban Street Food Blender Jet Takeoff at 1,000 Feet
No More Than a Half Hour (Depending on Specific Sound)	Very Loud to Pain Threshold	110-120	Chainsaw Rock Concert Jackhammer
No Safe Level	Possible Permanent Hearing Damage to Ear Drum Rupture	125-160	Jet Takeoff at 300 Feet and Less Noise During Stock Car Race Gun Blast