

well-being

AN EYE ON HEALTH

April is women's eye health and safety month

Did you know that worldwide, two-thirds of people affected by vision loss are women?

According to the National Eye Institute, National Institutes of Health, the reason for this is likely because women live longer than men and, therefore, are more susceptible to age-related eye disease.

At 90 and older, there are five times as many women living as men. Recent studies have shown that more women than men suffer from age-related macular degeneration, cataracts, glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy, the four leading eye diseases in the United States. Women are also at higher risk to develop sight-threatening autoimmune diseases such as multiple sclerosis, lupus and rheumatoid arthritis.

To educate women about the steps they can take to help stop vision loss, Prevent Blindness America has designated April as Women's Eye Health and Safety Month. They recommend that women age 40 and older make it a priority to have a dilated eye exam to help prevent vision loss. It is also important to have a dilated eye exam any time a change in vision is detected. The physicians of Retina Consultants of Southwest Florida have been making these same recommendations to our community for more than three decades.

Retina Consultants also recommends the following things that you can do to help maintain good vision:

» Monitor your vision: Check it often, and check it one eye at a time. If you notice a change in your vision, please notify your eye doctor right away.

» Do not smoke: Smoking significantly increases the risk of complications with certain eye diseases, especially in women.

» Eat a well-balanced diet: Eat leafy green vegetables, oily fish, and fruits. Vitamin C, vitamin E, beta carotene, lutein, zeaxanthin, zinc and omega-3 fatty acids are helpful in slowing down the progression of many eye diseases. If you choose to take vitamin supplements, please make sure to consult your doctor.

» Exercise: This will aid in maintaining a healthy weight and good cardiovascular health. Obesity, high blood pressure and high cholesterol can lead to specific vision complications.

» Control your diabe-



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tes: If you have it-Uncontrolled diabetes can cause permanent damage to eye structures.

» Wear sunglasses with UV protection: This can slow down the progression rate of cataracts.

» Educate yourself: About the possibility of a family history of eye disease and about eye diseases associated with your general health issues.

• See your general medical doctor regularly: Routine physicals can lead to early diagnosis of potentially sight threatening diseases.

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