

## Healthy Vision

April's focus is on eye health. It's a great time to learn how to keep your eyes healthy and prevent vision loss. Eye doctors aren't just for people who need glasses or contacts. Even if you don't think you have any problems with your eyes or vision, you could have a problem and not even know it—many eye diseases don't have any symptoms or warning signs in the early stages.

An eye exam is an important part of staying healthy. Routine eye exams are the best way to detect eye problems at an early stage when they're easier to treat. Plus, an eye exam may provide clues about your overall health and other health conditions like, diabetes and hypertension, because of their effect on the blood vessels and nerves visible in the eye.



**Learn more** with these activities:

**Activity 1: How your eyes work**

**Activity 2: Eye exam recommendations**

**Activity 3: Tips to keep your eyes healthy**

**Activity 4: Eye health crossword**

**More than 3.4 million Americans aged 40 years and older are blind or visually impaired** (Source: [CDC](#))

**90% of blindness caused by diabetes is preventable** (Source: [CDC](#))

 **Questions?** Email [Wellness@Medica.com](mailto:Wellness@Medica.com)

# Health disparities

“Health disparities” are preventable differences in health among different social or racial groups. Health Disparities are a complex and challenging problem across the world. Social factors play the largest role in shaping the overall health of communities. For example, the ability to access healthcare, a safe living environment, racial equity, nutritious food, quality education, and supportive relationships free of discrimination are all incredibly important to your overall health.

Those who face health disparities often have a higher risk for chronic conditions, such as diabetes and high blood pressure. In the U.S., certain racial and ethnic groups experience a higher risk for eye diseases and vision loss. Diabetes can lead to diabetic retinopathy and high blood pressure can cause glaucoma.

## Did you know?

- Hispanics and Latinos are about two and a half times more likely to have diabetes than non-Hispanic whites and 68% of Hispanics and Latinos have poorly controlled blood pressure, compared to 54% of non-Hispanic whites. (Source: [CDC](#)).
- Glaucoma is the leading cause of blindness among Hispanics and African Americans. (Source: [AAO](#))
- Three times as many African Americans have glaucoma and four times as many are blind, compared to whites. (Source: [AAO](#))
- African Americans, Hispanics and Asian Americans have a higher risk for diabetic retinopathy. (Source: [AAO](#))

For more information, please visit:

- [CDC: Vision Health Initiative](#)
- [CDC: Basics of Vision and Eye Health](#)

## Activity 1: How your eyes work

Did you know that vision depends on your brain as much as your eyes? Watch a short video on how your eyes work and check out the afterimages activity to learn what happens in the retina of your eyes.

[How your eyes work](#)

[Afterimages activity](#)

## Activity 2: Eye exam recommendations

Several factors determine how frequently you need to have an eye exam, including your age, race/ethnicity, health and risk of developing eye problems. Experts are not in agreement about when or how often most individuals should have eye exams (except for people with diabetes), but here are some general guidelines that the American Academy of Ophthalmology recommends:

- **Children and teens:** Your child’s pediatrician will screen for eye problems and refer you to an ophthalmologist if needed.
- **Adults under 40:** Have a complete eye exam every five to 10 years if your eyes are healthy and your vision is good. If you wear contact lenses, see your eye doctor once a year.
- **Adults 40-65:** Have a baseline eye exam at 40 and continue with follow-ups as recommended by your eye doctor. Changes in vision and early signs of disease may begin to appear.
- **Adults over 65:** Have an eye exam every year or every other year.
- **If you have diabetes, you should have a full eye exam at least annually to check for early damage from diabetes.** This is critical to prevent blindness. Diabetes is the #1 cause of blindness in the United States.
- **Have your eyes checked regularly if you:**
  - Have a family history of eye diseases.
  - Have an increased risk for eye diseases (e.g., glaucoma)—especially African Americans, Hispanics and Asian Americans.
  - Have hypertension.
  - Wear glasses or contact lenses.

Always check with your doctor about what’s right for you and your family members. And follow the schedule that your eye doctor recommends for future exams. Remember to check your medical benefit plan and/or vision insurance to know your coverage.

### What’s the Difference?

Optometrist	Ophthalmologist
Doctor of Optometry (OD) Provides primary vision care such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Eye exams</li><li>• Vision tests</li><li>• Prescriptions for glasses and lenses</li><li>• Diagnose and treat certain eye conditions</li></ul>	Medical doctor (MD) Provides the same services as an optometrist, plus they can also: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Diagnose and treat <i>all</i> eye conditions.</li><li>• Perform eye surgery.</li><li>• Research causes and cures for eye conditions and vision problems</li></ul>

Don’t wait for your next appointment if you experience any of these eye problems—decreased vision, double vision, floaters, flashes of light, circles (halos) around lights, eye pain, draining or redness of the eye— visit your eye doctor as soon as possible.

# Activity 3: Tips to keep your eyes healthy

Read through the tip sheet to learn about ways you can help keep your eyes healthy at any age and prevent vision loss.

## Get a routine eye exam

Even if your eyes feel fine and your vision is good, you could have a problem and not know it since many eye diseases don't have any symptoms or warning signs. An exam is the only way to check for eye diseases, which are easier to treat if caught early.

## Know your family's health history

Some eye diseases and conditions like age-related macular degeneration or glaucoma run in families. Talk with family members to find out if they've had any eye problems and be sure to tell your doctor.

## Take care of your overall health

Healthy habits, like eating well and being active, can lower your risk for diseases and conditions, such as diabetes or high blood pressure, which can lead to eye or vision problems.

- **Eat healthy foods:** Include plenty of foods rich in beta-carotene such as carrots, red bell peppers, spinach, kale and collard greens in your diet. Foods that are rich in omega-3 fatty acids, like salmon, tuna and halibut are great for your eyes as well.
- **Move your body regularly:** Being active can lower your risk of developing health conditions, like diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol, all of which can cause eye or vision problems.

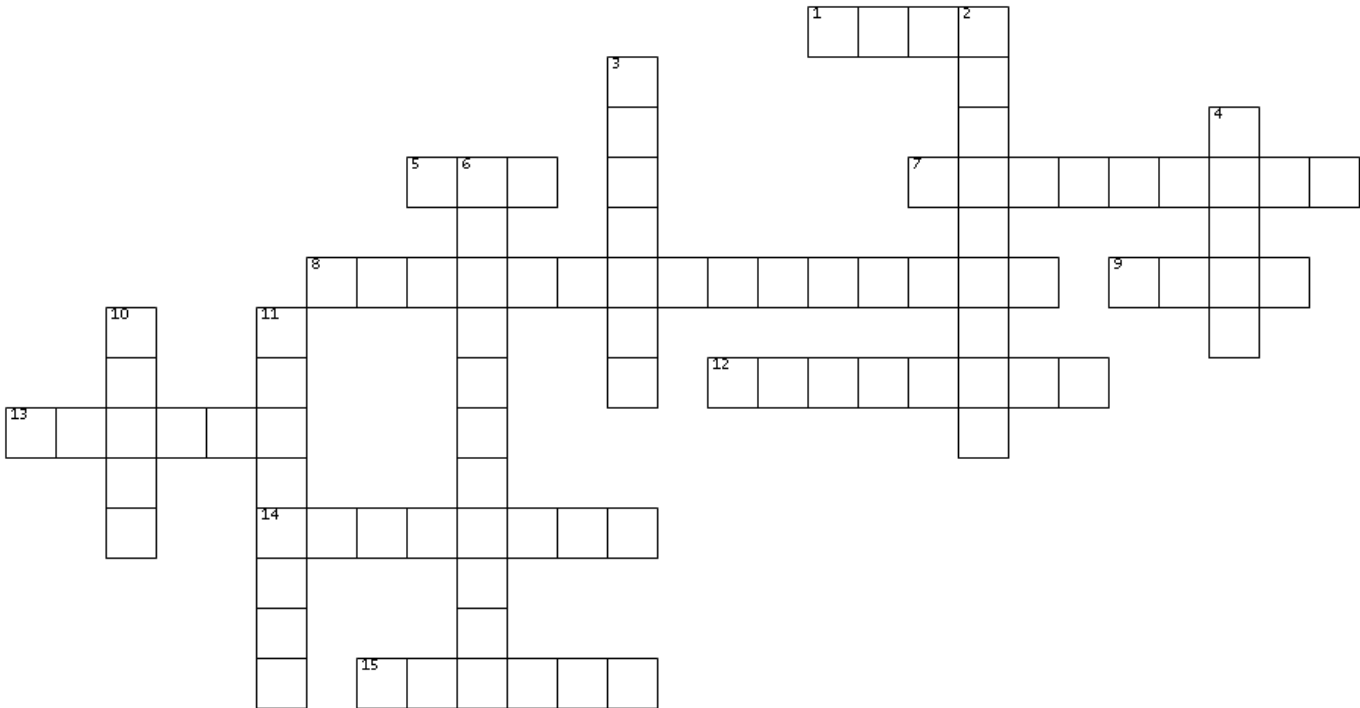
## Don't smoke

Smoking is not only bad for your lungs—it can hurt your eyes too! Smoking increases the risk of eye diseases like macular degeneration and cataracts. It can also harm the optic nerve. All of these can lead to vision loss.

## Protect your eyes from things that can harm them

- **Wear protective eyewear at work and play:** Safety glasses and goggles are designed to protect your eyes when doing certain activities, like playing sports, doing home repairs, or doing construction work.
- **Give your eyes a rest:** Staring at digital screens, watching too much TV, or sitting too close to the TV, won't hurt or damage your eyes but it can make them feel dry and tired.
  - **Blink often:** You blink 15 times in one minute, but studies show that you blink about half as often when you're looking at a screen.
  - **Follow the 20/20/20 rule:** When looking at a screen, every 20 minutes, look at least 20 feet away, for at least 20 seconds.
  - **Adjust your screen:** Place your screen about 25 inches away (about arm's length) and slightly below eye level. Adjust the brightness and contrast as needed. To cut any glare, move light sources or use a screen filter.
  - **Digital device tip:** Set grayscale and blue light filters on your phone/digital devices.
- **Prevent eye infections if you wear contacts:** Always wash your hands before putting them in and taking them out. Make sure to disinfect your contacts and replace them regularly.

# Activity 4: Eye health crossword



## ACROSS

1. Photoreceptor cell that helps you see colors.
5. Photoreceptor cell that helps you see at night.
7. Small part of your visual field where you can't see anything. (two words, no space)
8. Performs surgical treatment of eye conditions.
9. Muscles in this part of the eye control the size of the pupil.
12. The most common type of color blindness makes it hard to tell the difference between these two colors. (two words, no space)
13. Clear, domed-shaped front portion of the eye.
14. Term for when your eye's natural lens becomes cloudy.
15. Part of the eye that contains photoreceptor cells.

## DOWN

2. Keeps dust and debris out of your eyes.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ degeneration: A medical condition that may result in blurred or no vision in the center of the visual field.
4. Nerve at the back of your eye that connects to your brain.
6. Specializes in primary care of the eyes.
10. Age when changes in vision and early signs of disease may appear.
11. Eye disease that damages the optic nerve and can cause vision loss.

**Across**  
 1 is Cone  
 5 is Rod  
 7 is Blindspot  
 8 is Ophthalmologist  
 9 is Iris  
 10 is Forty  
 12 RedGreen  
 13 is Cornea  
 14 is Cataract  
 15 is Retina  
**Down**  
 1 is Eyelashes  
 2 is Cone  
 3 is Macular  
 4 is Optic  
 6 is Optometrist  
 10 is Forty  
 11 is Glaucoma