

## Seniors' Sight: Yearly Check Ups a Must

Growing older can be a time of renewed discovery. After all, scores of active seniors are now redefining what retirement can be. But even with all the potential for more quality years to get the most out of life, no one said growing older is always easy. On top of new aches and pains comes more chance for health complications. Not to mention different parts of our bodies – the eyes, for one, that just seem to stop working as well as we age.

That's why regular check ups and screenings are more and more important as people get older – and the eyes are no exception. We talked with Kimberly Robertson, O.D., a VSP doctor who practices near Chicago, to find out more about it.

“There's no doubt senior citizens are more prone than younger people to chronic eye disorders such as glaucoma, cataracts and macular degeneration,” says Dr. Robertson. “With all three of these conditions, early detection is critical.”

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“What a lot of older patients don't realize is that an eye exam can also uncover symptoms of significant health problems — including carotid artery blockages, hypertension, high cholesterol and diabetes,” she says. “I often refer senior citizens to their primary care doctors for diagnosis and treatment after finding one of the warning signs for these serious health conditions.”

An annual eye check up is a simple, low-stress way to keep tabs on your eye and overall health. Here are some the things your doctor will be looking for:

**Age-related macular degeneration (AMD).** This is the leading cause of blindness among seniors. But, early detection and treatment can slow its progress significantly. There are a couple different types of AMD. The type determines the treatment – ranging from laser surgery, medication or dietary supplements to slow the disorder.

**Glaucoma.** Glaucoma has been called, “the silent thief of sight” because too often, it goes unnoticed before too much damage is done to save vision. It's caused by too much pressure in the eyes. When doctors catch it early, they can often manage it effectively and prevent vision loss.

**Cataracts.** Cataracts are a nearly unavoidable part of aging. Over time, the lens in the eyes can get cloudy and yellow. But, updated eyewear prescriptions can often delay surgery, which is easy and low-risk.

**Diabetic retinopathy.** This affects diabetic patients and can rob sight. The tiny blood vessels in the eye that feed the retina become damaged and allow fluids to seep into the eye. Treatment includes changes in diet and exercise, and also surgery.

**Refractive errors.** Vision changes and usually worsens with age. A yearly check up will help keep vision sharp with updated eyewear prescriptions.

“Given all these advantages, it just makes good sense to keep that yearly appointment with the optometrist,” says Dr. Robertson.