

Love your eyes – achieving self-awareness of eye health

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According to the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB), almost everyone on earth is likely to have an eye health challenge in their lifetime.¹ Eye conditions manifest in various ways and affects people of every age group, race, economic status, gender, and creed, require expert evaluation. They include refractive errors (popularly known as long-sightedness or short-sightedness), cataracts, glaucoma, allergic conditions, ocular infections (such as conjunctivitis, epidemic adenoviral conjunctivitis popularly called apollo locally, trachoma, and onchocerciasis or river blindness), inflammatory conditions, eye injuries, age-related macular degeneration, diabetic and hypertensive eye diseases, squint, sickle cell-related eye conditions, and cancers. While some of these problems manifest as mere discomfort, others may be associated with significant morbidity and, even, mortality.

Globally, 2.2 billion people are visually impaired and may require specialist care.¹ However, the utilization of eye care services is somewhat poor. Olusanya et al² in Ibadan, Nigeria, reported that only about 24% of people with visual impairment ever sought orthodox care, and the main reason was the perception that eye problems were not

severe enough to warrant seeking specialist care. This wrong perception may result in avoidable blindness. In Nigeria, one in every 25 people aged 40 years and older is blind, and 84% of this blindness could have been prevented or treated.^{3,4}

World Sight Day is an international day of awareness observed annually on the second Thursday in October. It aims to raise public awareness and foster local involvement in the prevention of blindness. The theme for 2021 is “love your eyes,” and it highlights the need for self-awareness of eye health and strategies to achieve this. It also recognises that everyone counts and should, therefore, be involved if the fight against avoidable blindness is to be won.⁵ As a result, a global drive was initiated to encourage a million people to be proactive about their eye health by taking a sight test at prescribed intervals or caring for their eyes. Ideally, every healthy individual should have a comprehensive eye examination by an ophthalmologist once in two years if less than 40 years and yearly if above 40years.⁶ However, people with risk factors such as glaucoma or a family history of glaucoma, diabetes, hypertension, dyslipidemia, high or degenerating myopia, and age-related maculopathy, may require

more frequent evaluation to detect any problem early. It is necessary for people who have or are at risk of developing an eye disease to follow the recommended schedules for periodic reviews by ophthalmologists.⁶

The IAPB proposes a four-pronged strategy for caring for the eyes (the four Ps) - **prevent** vision loss by adopting a healthy diet and lifestyle, **protect** the eyes from harmful substances and habits at home and in the workplace, **preserve** eyesight by ensuring regular comprehensive eye examinations and adhering to the recommended management plan (e.g. using prescribed glasses), and **prioritise** eye health by including eye examination in routine medical checks, and educating friends and family to do same.⁵

Conclusion

A majority of the causes of blindness and visual impairment can either be prevented or treated. Therefore, being proactive about eye health can ultimately save sight. All hands must be on deck to ensure that everyone is willing and able to access eye care because everyone counts. Finally, pledge to “*love your eyes*” and spread the message to everyone around you.

References

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