

VIJAY TIMES Health & Fitness

BANGALORE, THURSDAY 16 JUNE 2005

It is possible to retain your natural visual acuity for a considerable period of time, provided you take adequate steps to maintain it, says
Dr Arun Samprathy

EYES are a precious gift to man. It is impossible to imagine yourself without the gift of vision. Taking proper care of your eyes will help prevent damage and loss of sight. With early detection, many eye problems can be treated and your risk of vision loss reduced.

How susceptible and exposed our eyes are
Everyday, we move around in a polluted atmosphere in our cities. Our eyes are exposed to all kinds of pollutants, dust, bacteria, suspended particulate matter, (SPM), pollen, toxic gases and industrial effluents. Eyelashes and eyelids give a certain amount of protection. Tears secreted from our eyes have the ability to remove most of the dirt and bacteria entering our eyes.

Preventing eye infections

We can take a few additional steps to prevent infections. Normally, your eyes get cleaned sufficiently by simply washing your face. If you have an oily skin, dandruff and 'lid crusting', it is recommended that you take extra care to prevent infections of the eyelid. The eyelid has sebaceous glands or sweat producing glands which can sometimes become blocked. This can cause infections. To help prevent this, gently massage the outside of the eyelids once a

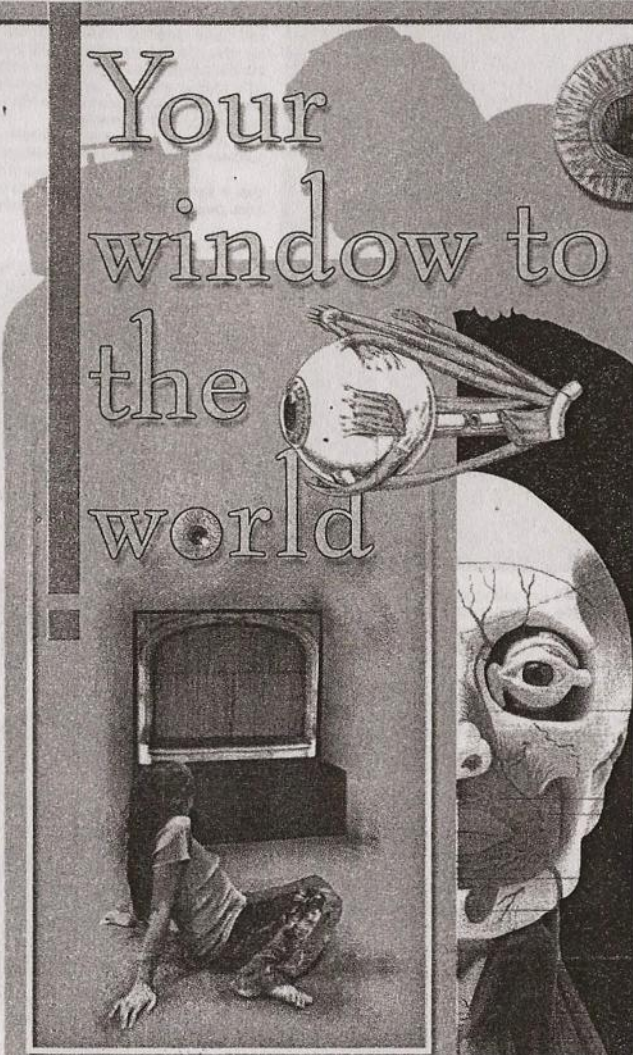
day with a hand towel, soaked in warm water. Equally important is the removal of all makeup and cleansing of the eyes at the end of each day. Particles of makeup can otherwise get into your eyes during the night and cause irritation.

Importance of nutrition

Vitamin A, C and E, Lutein and vitamin B2 are considered to be best for eyes. Vitamin A deficiency can lead to eye disorders with symptoms such as dryness of the conjunctiva. Food rich in vitamin A include carrots, green leafy vegetables, spinach, egg yolk, liver etc. Vitamin E is an antioxidant which protects the cells from the effects of free radicals that are potentially damaging byproducts of the body's metabolism. Free radicals can cause cell damage that may lead to diseases such as cataracts, cardiovascular disease and cancer. Food rich in vitamin E include vegetable oils, egg yolk, green leafy vegetables, nuts, etc. Like vitamin E, vitamin C is also an excellent antioxidant and helps to prevent cataracts and other ailments. Vitamin C is found in citrus fruits, melons, green leafy vegetables, raw cabbage, etc. Lutein can be found in all green leafy vegetables. Some research suggests that people who eat large amounts of fruits and vegetables containing lutein have a lower risk of age-related macular degeneration. Lutein also protects the eyes from the sun, especially important for people with light coloured eyes.

Protect your windows to the world

We need to protect our eyes at all times—at work, at home, while playing,



Your window to the world

swimming, etc. It is advisable to use protective glasses made of unbreakable materials like polycarbonate while working outdoors, driving etc. If you are wearing sunglasses be sure that it has ultra violet (UV) protection. Sunglasses are advisable for people spending long hours outdoors.

Myths about sunglasses

❖ **The darker my sunglasses, the better they are for my eyes:**

This is a myth. If your sunglasses do not have UV protection, the dark lenses may damage your eyes by dilating your pupil and letting in more of the harmful UV rays. In fact, brown or amber lenses are the best as they reduce the amount of blue light allowed through.

❖ **I only need to wear my sunglasses on sunny days:**

This, too is a myth. UV rays and blue light are actually present all the time during daylight hours and can do damage even when it's cloudy. However, these are the times when you are at a greater risk of over-exposure.

In case of eye injury

If you sustain an eye injury, the first thing you should remember is - NOT TO RUB your eyes. Rubbing your eyes will worsen the injury. Try to look into the eyes with a torch light, if available. If chemicals or dust enter your eyes, wash them with clean tap water. Cover the eye with a patch and consult your eye doctor at the earliest.

Role of an eye specialist

Having an eye check-up done, once in two years is the best way to ensure good eye health, if you are below 40 years. After 40, it is advisable to have yearly examinations. This is so because many of the eye ailments may not display any symptoms until they reach the final stages. An eye check-up does not mean just checking the 'number' of your spectacles, as is usually done at the optical shops. A thorough examination of the eyes, including the retina and measuring the eye pressure is necessary. This is particularly important if you have a history of eye problems in your family. Such tests are recommended in case you have diabetes or hypertension. It is quite possible to retain your natural visual acuity for a considerable period of time, provided you take sufficient steps to maintain it. ■

TV viewing tips

- ❖ Place the TV set to avoid glare and reflections from lamps, windows and other bright sources
- ❖ Adjust brightness and contrast controls to individual comfort
- ❖ Have the set at approximately eye level. Avoid having to look up or down at the picture
- ❖ Avoid staring at the screen for lengthy periods. Briefly look away from the picture, around the room or out through the window
- ❖ Wear lenses prescribed for vision correction, if advised to do so by your eye doctor
- ❖ View from a distance at least five times the width of the television screen
- ❖ Do not watch TV in a dark room