How Can Overall Health Affect the Eyes?

Eye exams are an important piece of your overall health. But, there is more to an eye exam than just making sure your vision is 20/20. The eyes are the window to the body and can show signs of overall body diseases, like diabetes, high blood pressure, inflammation and more. The eye is the only place a doctor can look and see all the blood vessels on display.

Did you know vision is one of the top 10 disabilities among adults 18 and older and one of the most common disabling conditions among children? Receiving an annual exam helps diagnose and treat eye diseases early before any permanent damage sets in. An annual eye exam is important because there are no warning signs for most eye diseases. In fact, the diseases below don’t cause pain and only cause vision changes after permanent damage has happened.

Let’s first talk about overall health problems that can affect your eye’s health. All of these can be detected by an eye doctor because of changes to the eyes.

- Diabetes means sugar in the blood is too high. It causes blood to flow slower and damages the vessels so they become leaky. These leaky blood vessels may cause bleeding, swelling and areas of blocked blood flow in the retina (the back of the eye). Vision loss is permanent and can cause blindness. Diabetic retinopathy is the leading cause of blindness in US adults.¹
- Blood pressure affects how well blood flows into the eye. Consistent high blood pressure damages blood vessels by making them narrower. These thinner vessels deliver less blood to the retina and can become blocked. This causes swelling, burst blood vessels and blocked arteries in the eye.
- Smoking is the number 1 controllable risk factor for macular degeneration. Macular degeneration is damage to the sensitive tissue in the macula, our area of best vision. Smoking can make you up to 7 times more likely to develop this disease.²
- Autoimmune diseases like Rheumatoid arthritis, crohn’s disease, lupus and others can cause blurred vision, red eyes or pain when looking at bright lights. Some of these diseases are treated with medication, which can increase the risk for eye related problems.³
- Thyroid Disease can cause a change in the position of the eye. Fat cells deposit in the wrong areas and the eye starts to “bulge” out of the socket. Patients may also have double vision, dry and red eyes.³

What can you do to protect your eyes?

- Eat green leafy vegetables, which are full of vitamins to preserve the eyes.
- Do 15 minutes of activity daily. This can lower eye pressure and prevent onset of glaucoma. It also helps with other diseases like diabetes and high blood pressure.⁴
- Wear sunglasses to decrease UV light in the eyes. It helps prevent macular degeneration.
- Stop smoking and try to avoid being around smoke.
- Have an annual eye exam. Treating diseases early is the key to prevent progression.

¹. https://www.cdc.gov/visionhealth/basics/ced/index.html
⁴. https://www.glaucoma.org/q-a/can-exercise-lower-eye-pressure.php