

# PRIMARY eyecare

## Poor vision is bad for your health

This may sound silly but we are not talking about blindness here, we are talking about slightly reduced vision; anything worse than 6/12 which is the standard for a driving licence in New Zealand.

There is very good evidence from around the world that even a mild reduction in vision to less than 6/12 has a significant impact on social isolation and healthy aging.

It also significantly impacts morbidity and mortality when you adjust for the many other factors you can measure.

Reduced vision really is a bad thing to have when measured against other health indicators.

Blindness and cancer are the two things people fear the most, so there is already recognition in the community that blindness should be prevented. Vision loss is also a significant cost to society and the government.

Poor vision is far more common in our community than most people realise.

Data has shown that blindness and vision loss treble for each decade over the age of 40 years. By age 90 half of the population has some form of visual impairment and 1 in every 8 are blind. With increased life expectancy and changing population profile there will be a significant increase in the amount of blindness and eye disease by 2020.

*Save our Sight* is an eye health awareness campaign led by the NZ Association of Optometrists which aims to reduce vision loss from preventable causes such as eye injury accidents, macular degeneration, glaucoma and other eye diseases.

*Save our Sight* is about applying the simple things we already know – glasses and regular eye exams, protecting eyes from injury, smoking cessation, decreased UV exposure, healthy eating for healthy eyes plus simple diabetes health promotion and awareness of glaucoma.

*Save our Sight* has some important messages for eye health education and eye health promotion. We need your help to get the messages out into the community.

Enclosed in this pack are some brochures and posters for display in your rooms. We have plentiful supplies of the eye health brochures so order as many as you require using the order form.

### **Save our Sight 2006 targets six major eye conditions**

**Cataract:** this remains a major problem as 100% of 90 year olds have clinically significant cataract (or have had cataract surgery)! So we will have to do more surgery and more efficiently, probably with no additional resources. There are 2 proven modifiable risk factors for cataract – smoking and UV exposure. Plus, optometrists can complete cataract assessments for patients and provide reports as requested.

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## Half of vision loss is correctable and a quarter is preventable.

**Diabetic retinopathy:** people with diabetes have 25 times more vision loss than healthy people. This is almost entirely preventable with good diabetic control & timely application of laser treatment. Good blood sugar control and screening for diabetic retinopathy are really important.

**Glaucoma:** 1 in 10 people will develop glaucoma if they live long enough. This is a very common disease. The problem is that half of the people with glaucoma do not know they have it and therefore can't be treated. The strongest indicator for glaucoma is a positive family history, so we need to promote this knowledge so that glaucoma patients can alert their family members.

**Macular degeneration:** Close to 70% of people over 90 have the early stages of ARM and 1 in 4 have vision loss because of it. There is one major lifestyle risk factor – smoking cessation. Recent studies on nutrients and eye health have suggested that diets rich in fruits, vegetables and fish decrease the risk of eye disease, in particular AMD and, to some extent, cataracts.

**Uncorrected refractive error:** In New Zealand, half of all visual impairment is due to refractive error. Either people do not have glasses but need them, or they are wearing the wrong prescription. This is more common in the elderly but still very common in the middle aged. Regular eye exams and glasses easily address this.

**Eye safety:** 20,000 people each year damage their eyes using power tools (welders, grinders, and drills), hand tools (hammers and saws) or garden tools (lawn mowers, hedge trimmers). Ninety percent of these injuries could be avoided with the use of protective eyewear.

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CARE

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