



## Look out for the top five thieves of eyesight

**T**his is the first in a five part series discussing the most common causes of vision loss in the United States.

The number of Americans who are legally blind or visually impaired is expected to double by the year 2030. In fact, an estimated 80 million Americans may already have a potentially blinding eye disease. But thankfully, half of all

vision loss is preventable with appropriate care and treatment.)

Number 5 in our countdown is a simple, but often overlooked, reason why many Americans are saddled with less than 20/20 vision: an uncorrected prescription. As simple as it may be, many children and senior citizens have slowly and imperceptibly lost vision due to changes in the size and shape of the eye, which can easily be corrected by contact lenses or glasses.

In young children, if one eye has normal vision while the other eye has a large prescription, a lazy eye (clinically called amblyopia) may develop. This occurs when the brain receives a clear image from one eye, and a very blurred image from the other eye. In order to function, the blurry eye is essentially ignored, and as a result, its area of visual function in the brain does not develop properly. If not diagnosed and treated early in life, the lazy eye is unlikely to ever see 20/20, even with glasses or contact lenses.

It is generally accepted that approximately 2% of the general population has amblyopia, and according to the National Eye Institute, it is the leading cause of vision loss in a single eye for adults aged 20-70 years or older. Thus a comprehensive eye exam early in life can prevent lifelong vision loss.

A public health initiative known as InfantSee, offers a no-cost eye health and vision assessment to any infant in their first year of life (specifically ages 6-12 months). Programs like InfantSee and others are now seeking to reduce the prevalence of amblyopia.

For senior citizens, subtle changes in the front and back of the eye can slowly change their prescription, leaving them less than 20/20, even if the eye is otherwise healthy. Factors such as poor overall health, fear of the unknown, a desire to just stay home, and inattention to personal well-being conspire to keep many seniors literally "in-the-dark," when a simple updated glasses prescription could restore vision. Further, many studies have found that poor vision produces a significantly greater risk of falls for those over age 70.

The easiest way to avoid/correct this type of vision loss, is with regular eye exams. So don't delay scheduling an exam for you or your loved one today.

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