



# AMERICAN ACADEMY™ OF OPHTHALMOLOGY

## Women Face Higher Risk of Blindness Than Men

Studies show there is a gender gap in eye disease. Women are more likely than men to suffer from sight-threatening conditions such as [age-related macular degeneration](#) (AMD), [cataracts](#), and [glaucoma](#).<sup>1</sup> In support of Healthy Vision Month in May, Monmouth Eye Care and the [American Academy of Ophthalmology](#) remind women to make vision a top priority.

Women make up 65 percent of AMD cases, 61 percent of glaucoma and cataract cases, and 66 percent of blind patients.<sup>2</sup> Why the inequity? There are a few theories. On average, women live longer; many eye problems are age-related. Some eye conditions, such as dry eye, are more common in women, young and old. Social and economic factors affect women's access to eye care, especially in developing countries.

Whatever the cause, there are a few unique vision problems women need to watch out for more than men. Dry eye occurs at double the rate in postmenopausal women.<sup>3</sup> In general, women are more susceptible to autoimmune diseases than men, many of which affect vision, such as [lupus](#), [Sjögren's syndrome](#) and [hyperthyroiditis](#). Also, pregnancy can cause vision changes due to hormone fluctuations.

Good news is most vision loss is preventable. The Academy offers five simple steps to take control of your eye health today:

1. **Get a comprehensive medical eye exam at age 40.** Early signs of disease or changes in vision may begin at this age. An exam by an ophthalmologist – a physician who specializes in medical and surgical eye care – is an opportunity to carefully examine the eye for diseases and conditions that may have no symptoms in the early stages. For those concerned about the cost of an exam, the Academy's [EyeCare America](#)® program may be able to help. More than 5,500 dedicated volunteer ophthalmologists provide eye exams and care, often at no out-of-pocket cost to eligible patients. Learn if you qualify at [eyecareamerica.org](#).

2. **Know your family history.** Certain [eye diseases can be inherited](#). If you have a close relative with macular degeneration, you have a 50 percent chance of developing this condition. A family history of glaucoma increases your glaucoma risk by four to nine times. Talk to family members about their eye conditions. It can help you and your ophthalmologist evaluate your risk.

3. **Eat healthy foods.** A diet low in fat and rich in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, benefits the entire body, including the eyes. Eye-healthy food choices include citrus fruits, vegetable oils, nuts, whole grains, dark green leafy vegetables and cold water fish.

4. **Stop smoking.** Smoking increases the risk for eye diseases such as cataract and age-related macular degeneration. Smoking also raises the risk for cardiovascular diseases which can indirectly influence your eye health. Tobacco smoke, including second-hand smoke, also worsens [dry eye](#).

5. **Wear sunglasses.** Exposure to ultraviolet UV light raises the risk of eye diseases, including cataract, fleshy growths on the eye and cancer. Always wear sunglasses with 100 percent UV protection and a hat while enjoying time outdoors.

“Eye exams aren’t only about checking a person’s visual acuity or sharpness, but also determining the overall health of their eyes,” said Rebecca J. Taylor, M.D., clinical spokesperson for the American Academy of Ophthalmology. “We encourage women as well as men to get regular eye care. By making vision a priority today, we can help protect our sight as we age.”

To learn more ways to keep your eyes healthy, visit the American Academy of Ophthalmology’s [EyeSmart](#)® website.