

Outdoor health tips from the Posse:

Healthy eyes are important

Ever since the third grade, I have been burdened with terrible eyesight. At first I thought that the world had gone blurry, possibly because of the Russians. My grandmother informed me that the world had not gone blurry, but that perhaps I needed glasses.

Ever since I heard those cruel words, I have been forced to wear glasses. Each year, the prescription gets just a few clicks worse. Add to that bifocals because of aging eyes, and I have the full Monte of bad eyesight. Thank goodness for Hi-index poly-carbonate lightweight lenses; because my head would not be able to support the weight of traditional glass.

Spending time outdoors has long been proven to help our overall health, but recent studies indicate that it can be good for our eyes as well. Although spending too much time in the sun without eye protection from the sun's ultraviolet rays can cause damage to the eyes and skin, new studies indicate that natural light may be essential for normal eye development in children.

Children today spend a great deal of time indoors, playing video games and staring into I-Pads and cell phones. Because of this, nearsightedness is more common today in the United States than it was back in the 1970's.

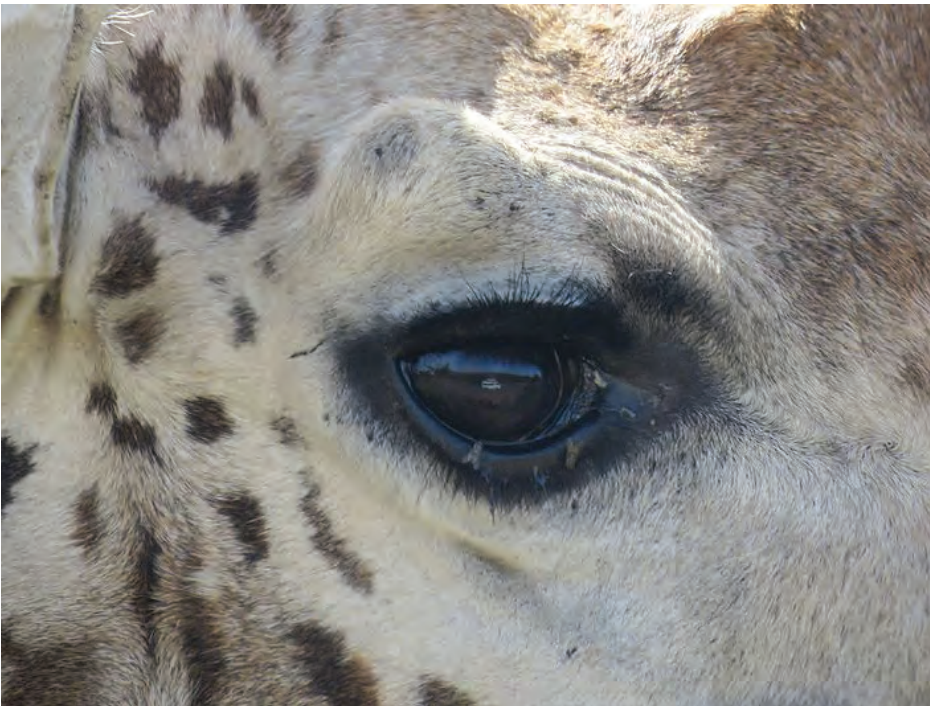
According to one of the studies reported by the American Academy of Ophthalmology, each additional hour children spent outdoors per week dropped their risk of being nearsighted by two percent. The study showed that nearsighted children spent on average 3.7 fewer hours per week outdoors than those kids who had normal vision or were farsighted.

A second study found that when school kids were required to spend 80 minutes of recess time outdoors every day, fewer of them became nearsighted when compared to children who were not required to spend recess outdoors.

Researchers don't know exactly why outdoor time is beneficial, but believe it's probably related to exposure to natural daylight rather



Mark Rackay
Tips from the Posse



Your eyes are the most important sense you have and should be taken care of. A safari vehicle is seen in the reflection of this eye of a giraffe. (Wikimedia Commons/ Wikikratsw)

than other specific activities. I must be the exception because I am very nearsighted and spent most of my childhood outdoors, except to eat and sleep.

For the rest of us it is probably too late to spend time during our childhood outdoors but there are still things we can do to promote overall eye health.

For starters, get a comprehensive annual check-up from your eye doctor. Diseases like glaucoma, cataracts and age-related macular degeneration (AMD) have the best chance for treatment when detected early. The eye exam can also help detect diabetes in some people.

While early detection of problems can help your eyesight, so can living a healthy lifestyle. Eating green leafy vegetables and eggs are good for the eyes because both are high in lutein and zeaxanthin, nutrients that have been found to reduce the risk of eye diseases. Eating foods high in vitamins A and C, along with vitamin E, have all been proven to promote eye health.

Folks who have diabetes are at a special risk of eye disease. If your blood sugar is too high, for too long a period of time, you run the risk of developing an eye disease called diabetic retinopathy, which can affect anyone with Type 1 or Type 2 diabetes, and

is the leading cause of blindness in working aged adults.

Diabetes can also put you at increased risk for glaucoma and cataracts. Proper management of your diabetes is very important. Properly managed, most people with diabetes will never have any eye problems because of the disease.

Hopefully everyone understands the health problems associated with smoking, such as cancer and heart disease, but smoking and exposure to second-hand smoke can also damage your eyes.

Smokers have a four-times greater risk of developing AMD compared to nonsmokers. If you are someone who is exposed to secondhand smoke, your risk of AMD doubles. Smokers also have three times greater risk of developing cataracts compared to nonsmokers.

For folks who spend lots of time outdoors, special care should be taken to protect your eyes. Ultra violet rays, like the sun produces, have very bad effects on your eyes.

UV radiation from the sun can trigger the onset of cataracts. It is a common misconception that cataracts are age related. Cataracts can and do occur at just about any age, and the sun can make them appear sooner. Sunlight that is reflected from the surface

of water or snow can cause conjunctivitis and keratitis. Symptoms of conjunctivitis, sometimes called "pink eye" include intense itching, a gritty feeling in the eye, redness, a watery discharge and a runny nose.

Keratitis is a generic term to describe a variety of corneal infections, irritations and inflammations of the eye. It is important to obtain medical attention immediately because delay can cause scarring which would cause vision problems for the rest of your life.

Sunglasses and a hat are the ticket to prevent problems for your eyes from UV rays. Look for glasses that provide 100 percent UV absorption. The label will say something like "UV absorption up to 400nm" which translates to 100 percent protection.

Polarized lenses are my choice for outdoors but they are not necessarily the same as UV protected glasses. Polarized glasses have a special filter for reducing glare but may not provide maximum UV protection. UV protected lenses are treated with a special chemical to improve their UV absorption.

Then it comes down to exercise. We all know how good exercise is for our mood, metabolism, weight, and overall health, but exercise is equally important for your eyes. A regular exercise routine can reduce the risk of cataracts, glaucoma and AMD.

One study published in the British Journal of Ophthalmology showed that people who regularly exercise three or more times per week substantially lower risk of developing wet age-related AMD, a more serious type of AMD.

Our eyes are the most important tools for outdoor enjoyment we have and we must always take care of them. With the amount of vegetables my wife makes me eat, and the time I spend outdoors, I should have the eyes of a hawk. I missed something somewhere.

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press and avid hunter who travels across North and South America in search of adventure and serves as a Director for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. For information about the Posse call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org For outdoors or survival related questions or comments, feel free to contact him directly at his email elkhunter77@bresnan.net. ●



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