



SOUTH CAROLINA FAMILY AND COMMUNITY LEADERS

Affiliated with
National Volunteer Outreach Network, Country Women's Council, U.S.A., Associated Country Women of the World
and in partnership with Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service

SEE THE FUTURE! **Your vision as you age**

Objectives:

1. Participants will understand changes in eyes and vision during aging
2. Participants will learn how live with low vision
3. Participants will become aware of warning signs of possible eye disorders
4. Participants will understand the importance of regular vision examinations

Advance Preparation:

For the 20/20 distance vision test, hang the Vision Test Poster on a lighted wall and mark a spot 20 feet from the chart for participants to stand while taking the test. If the "Normal Vision" (3/8 inch high) line can be read at 20 feet, that is 20/20 vision.

When participants arrive, suggest that they test themselves using the eye chart (or, participants could do this at the end of the meeting).

Introduction:

Ask: What does having good vision mean to you?

Say: You should expect to see clearly in the future. Not with a crystal ball, but with healthy eyesight. Some vision changes are a normal part of aging. However, significant changes or loss in vision are not normal, age-related changes. If you do experience them, you should contact your eye care professional immediately. There is much you can do to protect the health of your eyes, which will in turn help you stay safe and independent.

This lesson will help you understand:

- Normal changes in eyes and vision as you age
- Ideas for living with low vision
- Warning signs of possible eye disorders
- Importance of regular eye examinations

Normal vision, often referred to as "twenty-twenty" (20/20) vision, means you can read printed letters that are 3/8 inch high from 20 feet away. Many people can see better than this. A vision of 20/40 means you can read the letters at 20 feet that a person with normal vision can read from a 40-foot distance. The Snellen Chart used for this test was created by Dutch ophthalmologist Hermann Snellen, in the late 1800s.



One out of two people in the U.S. requires corrective lenses. Eyeglasses and contacts correct many vision problems, and minor adjustments in environment or lifestyle can compensate for other vision problems. However, some vision changes can dramatically affect a person's life. Nearly 17 percent of the population over age 40 has a problem with their vision that affects their lives in some way.

You can get a very rough idea of your visual acuity with the eye chart included in this lesson. However, this and other self-tests, such as the Amsler Grid, cannot substitute for a check-up by your eye care professional.

The motto of the Sight Council of America is "Check Yearly, See Clearly." Annual eye check-ups are an essential part of health maintenance as we age. Think of them as an investment in your future health, safety, and independence, not as an inconvenience or an unnecessary expense.

Distribute Handout 1 "See the Future!"

Ask: What can we expect from our vision as we get older?

Say: As we age, almost everyone experiences some changes in vision. These include:

Loss in the ability to focus on things close to us, small print becomes more difficult to see, and it takes longer to switch focus from something close to something far away. This condition is called presbyopia, which simply means "aging eyes." It is a result of the lens in the eye becoming less flexible and the small, inner-eye muscles weakening.

Peripheral, or side vision, reduces. This is because muscles around the lens also weaken. We become less aware of people coming up beside us, cars in the lane next to us, or overhanging limbs and open cabinet doors that could be hazardous.

It is more difficult to see in dim light. Our pupils dilate more slowly and not as much as we age. As a result, less light enters our eyes. Seeing clearly when we are in a poorly lighted environment is a greater challenge. It makes driving at night or reading in dim light more difficult.

We have more difficulty seeing objects with little contrast to one another. It is harder to distinguish one dark color from another or to distinguish between very light colors at all. We see much less contrast when items aren't distinctly different colors; for example, black and navy blue. We are less likely to be able to see someone's facial expression to determine their mood, or read their lips to help us understand their words. We may miss where steps start if the edge is not marked clearly, or we may not be able to tell we are approaching uneven surfaces.

It takes longer to adapt to changing light levels. This means that when going from the well-lighted lobby into the darker movie theater, you need to pause longer than you did in the past before you can see where the empty seats are.

Eyes are more sensitive to glare. Shiny magazine pages may be harder to read than "matte finished" pages.



Yellowing of the lens of the eye. A common result of prolonged exposure to light, especially sunlight, is a yellowing of the lens. The result is very much like looking through a yellow glass or sheet of cellophane. People exposed during their lifetimes to more sunlight without protective glasses experience to a greater degree this yellowing and inability to distinguish contrasts and colors.

Optional Activity: Distribute Strips of Yellow Cellophane. Hold the yellow cellophane over your eyes. This simulates the effect of decades of exposure to light for your eyes. Ask participants what differences are noticed when looking through the cellophane.

Say: All these changes occur gradually as we age. We seldom notice the changes from day to day or even year to year. Let's take a moment and think about what we can do to compensate for these changes in vision. What can we do to compensate for:

Reduced ability to see fine details?

Suggestions: Use glasses and/or a magnifying glass; get books and newspapers with larger print

Reduced peripheral vision?

Suggestions: Turn head and eyes farther in each direction rather than rely on peripheral vision

Loss of contrast sensitivity?

Suggestions: Use brighter lights, making certain they do not shine directly into your eyes; ask others for their perception of color; place small labels on shoes or clothes tags indicating which is navy blue and which is black

Difficulty seeing in low light?

Suggestions: Leave lights on when you leave home or set lights on a timer so they are on when you return after dark; try not to drive at dusk or after dark; have your car's headlights checked and replaced if they are not clean and bright; put the highest wattage bulbs recommended into light sockets in rooms you use frequently, especially for reading and hobbies; place the brightest lights available at your home's entry and near any stairs, even if it is just a single step; prevent glare from lights by aiming the light at stairs, rather than into your eyes

Slowed transition to different levels of light.

Suggestions: Allow greater distances between cars when driving; make a habit to pause when going into a room with different light levels

Say: If you or someone you live with faces the challenge of living with low vision, here are some things you can do to improve the safety and convenience of your environment.

Increase light levels. Make certain lighting is adequate in activity areas, such as the kitchen, and at entrances to the house.

Control glare. Reduce shiny surfaces; make certain lamps and lights have shades that direct the light to the floor or work area rather than into your eyes.



Mark edges. Place paint strips at the edges of stairs, sidewalks, or even a single step down into a living room or patio.

Allow more time. Remember to pause when entering a room with a different light level, and to move slowly when navigating unknown or uneven ground.

Add safety measures. Grab bars and stair rails on both sides of stairways can help a person steady himself if he misjudges the distance to the next step.

Keep objects in the same place, so you don't have to search for them.

Use low-vision aids. They range from telephones with large-print buttons to magnifying sheets to place over an entire page. Your lifestyle, interests, and specific details about your vision can help determine what equipment can help. Your vision care professional can help you locate the items.

In addition to your annual vision check-up, it's time to visit an eye care professional **if** you have difficulty:

- Reading the telephone directory or newspaper
- Writing checks
- Participating in hobbies you used to enjoy
- Reading street signs when driving
- Seeing expressions on people's faces
- Walking without bumping into corners or tripping on curbs

Summary:

Remember, some normal vision changes occur as we get older, but we should still be able to maintain healthy eyesight. The first step to eye care is a regular vision check-up with a qualified eye care professional. If your insurance coverage does not include vision care, contact your local office of Aging Services or your local Health Department. These are located in the Local Government pages of your phone book. They should be able to assist you in finding services.

If your eye care professional determines that no more can be done to correct or restore your vision, contact a low-vision rehabilitative service in your community. Your local Aging Services office or Health Department will be able to refer you to these. They can help you obtain training, equipment, and services to assist in your daily activities.

Adapted for South Carolina by Nancy M. Porter, Ph.D., Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service from materials prepared by Jeanne Brandt, Oregon State University, Family and Community Development, Washington County.



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Handout 1

SEE THE FUTURE! Your vision as you age

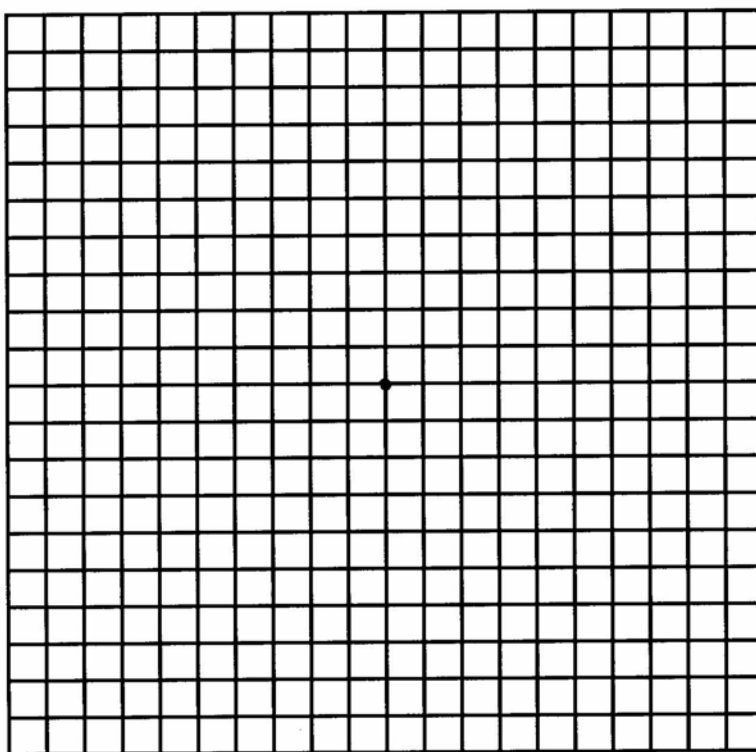
| Vision Changes Associated with Aging | Living With Low Vision |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Harder to focus close up | 1. Increase light levels |
| 2. Small print harder to see | 2. Control glare |
| 3. Takes longer to switch focus from near to far | 3. Mark edges |
| 4. Peripheral vision reduced | 4. Allow more time |
| 5. Lens of eye yellows | 5. Add safety measures |
| 6. Harder to see in dim light | 6. Keep objects in the same place |
| 7. Takes longer to adapt to changes in light levels | 7. Use low-vision aids |
| 8. More sensitive to glare | |

Amsler Grid

Directions: Hold the grid 12 to 14 inches from your face. Look directly at the spot in the middle of the grid, using one eye at a time. Note any distortions, blurred spots, or missing spots on the grid.

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Vision Test Poster

S C F C L

E Y E

T E S T

N O R M A L V I S I O N

(The line above is 3/8 inch high)

A T T W E N T Y F E E T

