

Don't Limit Sunny Days with Cloudy Vision

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Summer is just around the corner! It is a great time to get outside and enjoy the bright, vivid colors this season has to offer.

While grabbing the sunscreen, it is also important to grab a wide-brimmed hat and pair of sunglasses with 100% UV protection. Excessive exposure to the sun can result in significant damage to the eyes. The longer eyes are exposed to ultraviolet (UV)/solar radiation, the greater the risk of developing chronic and acute eye conditions such as cataracts and macular degeneration.¹

As a valued partner to your clients, you consistently provide them with information on a variety of benefits and other health-related topics. Your clients appreciate any information they can use to reinforce the importance of benefit enrollment and encourage utilization, as they recognize that regular eye exams are an important tool in the early diagnosis and treatment of systemic diseases as well as ophthalmic conditions. Many of your clients' employees may not be aware of the risk factors that also make them susceptible to cataract development, how cataracts are diagnosed, or treatment options. Everyone is at risk for eye damage. Through education, your clients can discredit some of the myths their employees may have about their eyes and cataracts.

According to the National Eye Institute, cataracts are one of the leading causes of blindness in the United States. A cataract is a clump of protein found on the lens of an eye that typically forms after years of wear and tear. While many people believe that only senior citizens can develop cataracts, cataracts can occur in younger adults as well. A few risk factors that can potentially increase the likelihood of developing cataracts at a younger age include prolonged exposure to UV radiation, eye injuries, eye inflammation, smoking, prolonged steroid use, genetics and systemic diseases such as diabetes and hypertension.

As a trusted benefit advisor, the tips and information you share with your clients can help them motivate their employees to prioritize preventive measures.

Symptoms

Cataract symptoms vary based upon the type of cataract the individual has. Cataracts develop slowly, and many symptoms are not apparent until after vision is significantly impacted. A few symptoms include cloudy or blurry vision, reduced ability to see the intensity of colors, enhanced sensitivity to glare, reduced vision at night, double vision and progressive nearsightedness. Cataracts limit the amount of light that passes through the lens of an eye, resulting in vision loss.

Diagnosis

A comprehensive eye exam enables an eye doctor to detect eye disease and conditions that may not be obvious to the patient. This vision exam includes, but is not limited to case history, examination for pathology anomalies, job visual analysis, refraction, visual field testing and tonometry (measurement of pressure within the eye). The results of this exam will help the eye doctor make an official diagnosis.

Treatment

Depending on when cataract symptoms appear or the amount of development present during an official diagnosis, individuals may be able to improve their vision with a new prescription for eyeglasses or contacts. Upon diagnosis, the cataract should be monitored by an eye doctor. Generally, a cataract will be removed via surgery if a new prescription does not correct the vision loss, if it impacts the treatment of another eye-related issue, or if it interferes with daily activities. Cataract removal is an elective surgery that is normally performed as an outpatient procedure. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the success rate of cataract surgery is 98%. Patients should talk to their doctor to determine which treatment is best for their cataract(s).

Prevention

An estimated 22 million Americans age 40 and older have cataracts.² There are many research studies in progress to clinically identify treatment to prevent cataract development. With a variety of risk factors associated with this condition, it is important to minimize the risks, if possible. An annual, comprehensive eye exam is a minimum best practice, however, individuals with a family history of eye diseases or medical conditions that increase the risk of eye disease may need to have exams more frequently. It is also important to maintain a healthy diet full of eye-nurturing nutrients such as lutein (green leafy vegetables), vitamin E (sunflower seeds and almonds), Omega-3 fatty acids (flaxseed oil and fatty fish) and zinc (pumpkin seeds and oysters).

Enjoying the sunny days of summer can be safer with the buffer provided by a pair of wrap-around sunglasses that provide 100% UV protection (or UV block contacts) and a wide-brim hat to prevent eye damage. Employees are likely to be familiar with the connection between sunlight and skin care yet less aware of the link between sunlight and eye damage. Excessive exposure from UV radiation—including reflections from water, snow and pavement—can actually sunburn the eye. Individuals with eye diseases and other medical conditions may be more susceptible to damage even with limited exposure.

Most people do not go to the eye doctor until they notice some form of vision loss. As a trusted benefit advisor, the tips and information you share with your clients can help them motivate their employees to prioritize preventive measures. Through education, employees can shift their perception of how vision benefits can help them beyond corrective services. With Prevent Blindness America designating June as Cataract Awareness Month, this is a great time to discuss the importance of taking preventive measures to maintain and/or improve eye health. Poor vision directly correlates with decreased productivity, which ultimately impacts the bottom line. By taking steps to prevent conditions, illnesses and diseases before they occur, employees can impact their overall health and well-being. By taking advantage of the preventive coverage their vision plan has to offer along with taking preventive measures to protect themselves from the potential damage from the sun, employees are decreasing their risks for developing eye-related conditions such as cataracts.

With your assistance, your clients can encourage their employees to not limit the bright, colorful and sunny days of summer with cloudy vision. **HIU**

1 American Optometric Association. "UV Protection." <http://www.aoa.org/uv-protection.xml>. (April 9, 2013)

2"Vision Problems in the U.S.," National Eye Institute and Prevent Blindness America, 2008.