

Better eye care during aging means "*team work*"

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Summary: Better eye care for aging patients means more than just examining the eyes and vision. When the patient provides a full medical history, the eye examination becomes an opportunity for an eye doctor to identify an array of health issues that a comprehensive eye exam can reveal. This allows for the coordination of other health care providers, when needed, and results in "team work" leading to better overall health care as well for the patient.

An eye examination for people over forty becomes an "opportunity" for more than just good eye care. It's an opportunity for early detection, preventive care and good health care beyond the eyes.

Certainly, a good eye examination is meant to thoroughly assess the health of your eyes and the status and vision correction needs. This is done directly by careful evaluation of the external tissues of the eye and its surrounding structures. The internal examination of the eye includes viewing and assessing the retina, vitreous and optic nerve. This is accomplished through a dilated pupil examination where the pupil is opened widely with dilating eye drops and a powerful light is used to illuminate the internal eye so the doctor can look in with magnifying lenses and instruments.

The pressure inside the eye is also measured in a complete eye examination by a test called tonometry. This is an important measurement in the diagnosis of glaucoma, a serious eye disease and one which we will be discussing in depth in upcoming columns. The examining doctor may also order additional tests to evaluate the eyes for glaucoma and other eye diseases which may occur during aging. But of equal value and importance, general health problems can also be determined by these tests and the eye examination in general with a little "team work."

The value of all of the sophisticated examination procedures, tests and technologies used for examining eyes can be dramatically enhanced when used in a team approach. By that we mean a team consisting of your eye doctor, other health care professionals and *you*, the patient. Let's try to explain what that means.

The real eye examination, in fact any kind of health examination, begins with you, the patient, identifying for the doctor general and specific signs and symptoms you may be experiencing. During an eye examination, the "patient history" as it is called, need not be limited to just the eye or vision signs and symptoms you are experiencing. It should include a description of problems or concerns with your general health as well. This approach makes you, the patient, the "team leader."

From such a comprehensive history, the eye doctor can then expand your eye examination when necessary to help identify findings or changes which might be associated with any of the signs and symptoms you have mentioned in your "history." Many cardiovascular problems common during aging, diabetes, neurological diseases and numerous other medical conditions are reflected in the tissues, blood vessels and structures of the eye. Remember, while the poet wrote that "the eyes are the windows to the soul," in health care we also believe "the eyes are the window to the body."

Through such an approach, you and your eye doctor have the opportunity to introduce other "team members" (other health care providers) into your care in a timely manner. Often times, what may have started out as a "simple eye examination" can go far beyond the eyes to identify an early or developing health problem, prevent further advancement or serious complications or even sometimes, save a life. It's all possible with "team work" starting with the eye examination.

You, your eye doctor and regular eye examinations are the makings of a powerful and beneficial "team" to provide better care for your eyes and your vision as well as your overall health. With the addition and support of other health care providers called upon by your eye doctor when and if something is identified from your eye examination and your history, you will benefit with timely and better health care. Such a team approach can make good eye care, better during aging and make your eye care mean a lot more than just a pair of glasses.