



Protecting Your “Windows to the World”

By Julie Chen, M.D., ophthalmologist

All adults should get regular eye disease screening exams, as recommended by the American Academy of Ophthalmology. Since your perception of the world can change tremendously with vision problems, it's also important to know the risk factors of common eye diseases, including glaucoma, cataracts, and diabetic retinopathy. For all three, regular eye exams are the best way to prevent vision loss.

Glaucoma

Glaucoma is a group of eye conditions that ultimately result in damage to the optic nerve. The two most common types are open angle and angle closure glaucoma.

The vision loss associated with open angle glaucoma—the most common type—is painless. Since peripheral vision is affected first, most patients don't notice any changes until over 50% of their vision has been lost. Unfortunately, once damage to the optic nerve has occurred, it's not reversible. Screening eye exams are the only way to detect the disease in the early stages. Screening is particularly important if you're near-sighted, have a family history of glaucoma, or are African American, a group that is six to eight times more likely to be affected than Caucasians.

When open angle glaucoma is diagnosed, it can usually be managed with eye drops. In advanced cases, laser treatment or surgery may be necessary. Early detection is the key to successful treatment.

The second major type of glaucoma—angle closure glaucoma—can start suddenly, and is considered an eye emergency. Symptoms include sudden onset of blurry vision, eye pain and nausea. If you ever develop these symptoms, please contact your eye doctor immediately or go to the nearest emergency room. If you are of Asian ethnicity or have a family history of glaucoma, you're at greater risk. Angle closure glaucoma can often be prevented with a simple in-office laser procedure. Again, regular eye exams are the best way to prevent vision loss from this disease.



Cataracts

Cataracts, which are a change in the color and clarity of the lens, are the most prevalent eye disease. Common symptoms include blurry vision even with glasses and difficulty with night driving due to glare. The biggest risk factor, by far, is age. By age 65, almost half of all Americans will have significant cataracts. Additional risk factors include diabetes, steroid use and smoking. Luckily, cataracts can be easily removed with surgery. Cataract surgery is a safe and well-tolerated outpatient procedure with minimal recovery time. In fact, it's the most commonly performed surgical procedure in the U.S.

Diabetic Retinopathy

Diabetic patients are at risk of developing diabetic retinopathy, which is damage to the blood vessels in the back of the eye. At a minimum, all diabetic patients should have annual eye exams to monitor for this potentially blinding disease. Diabetic eye disease can be managed with laser treatments, but the best way to prevent the disease is by carefully controlling your diabetes.

Meet Dr. Chen

Julie Chen, M.D. is a native of Texas. She attended Harvard University and Harvard Medical School and then completed her ophthalmology residency and glaucoma fellowship

training at the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF). She was drawn to ophthalmology because she feels that vision has an immeasurable impact on a patient's quality of life. As an ophthalmologist, she works to protect and preserve vision, which she finds incredibly rewarding.

Dr. Chen sees both general ophthalmology and glaucoma patients. She's also a clinical instructor at UCSF. Outside of work, Dr. Chen resides in Solano County and spends most of her free time with her family, including 3-year-old and 6-month-old sons.

Dr. Chen is a member of Solano Regional Medical Group, the multispecialty medical group affiliated with Sutter Regional Medical Foundation. She sees patients in Fairfield and Vacaville. To schedule an appointment, call 707-427-4900 or visit srmf.org.

