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Dr. Mark D. Fromer is a board- certified ophthalmologist since 1988

Vision Problems and Self-Care

Nine out of ten people tell us that sight is the sense they most fear losing. Despite being one of the richest nations in the world, we aren't doing enough to protect our sight. Sight loss increases with age and we have an aging population, so the number of people losing their sight is set to double in the next few decades if we don't intervene now. Around 60 percent of vision loss is avoidable or treatable. We all need to take responsibility both professionally and personally - to improve eye health, eliminate avoidable sight loss and enhance the quality of life of people who have lost some or all of their sight.

A survey found a shocking lack of awareness that leads to blindness. This calls for an increase investment in public awareness because treatable conditions are going undetected.

Helping people understand how to best look after their sight and prevent avoid-

able vision loss is the key. For example less than one in six people are correctly identified with the conditions that they have, such as age-related macular degeneration or glaucoma. Having access to the right information, appropriate services and suitable support is important. We can increase early detection through regular eye exam which could lead to blindness if left untreated. We can also build on progress such as reduced waiting times for cataract operations by improving access to timely sight saving treatment for everyone. About half of vision loss is avoidable or treatable. For instance people with glaucoma are at risk of losing their sight simply because they don't know they have it. Thousands more are struggling to live with such low levels of vision that they would qualify as blind or partially sighted. This patient population is unaware of the range of options widely available to restore their vision. To develop a unified plan for action on all issues relating to eye health and sight loss, we need to work together. We need to create a society

where we do look after the health of our eyes and the key to this is to understand enough about the health of our eyes, and the lifestyle we choose that can have a massive impact on our sight. Simply knowing that giving up smoking and keeping our weight within a healthy range will give us all the best chance of safeguarding our sight and in some cases half a person's chances of developing a sight condition that could lead to blindness.

Self-Care Steps

- Have regular eye exams every 2 to 3 years if you don't have any vision problems, and every year if you wear eye-glasses or have other vision problems and yearly after age 60. Your doctor or eye specialist may recommend more frequent exams, especially if you wear contact lenses.
- Wear safety glasses or goggles whenever you use power tools, lawnmowers or other devices that could cause objects to fly toward your eyes.

- Wear sunglasses with ultra violet protection when you are out in bright sun light. Be especially careful when sunlight is reflected by water or snow. Too much

UV light has been linked to cataracts and increased risk for age-related macular degeneration.

- Don't smoke. It can put you at higher risk for age-related macular degeneration and other eye problems.

- If you have diabetes or high blood pressure, keep it under control. You should get regular eye exams. These conditions increase the risk of eye diseases.

Most vision problems develop gradually. If any of the following symptoms occur suddenly, seek immediate medical help: Seeing bright lights or sudden appearance of large numbers of floaters; sudden loss of sight, especially in one eye; loss of part of your visual field; loss of vision related to injury to eyes or head; double vision; or vision changes with paralysis or weakness.

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Heavy drinkers, smokers face Alzheimer's risk

By Manoj Jain

Occasionally forgetting where you left your car or scooter keys or being unable to recall the name of a distant acquaintance are normal memory lapses. However, frequent spells of forgetting names and places or repeating stories, phrases and questions in the same conversation along with confusion and irritability could be early signs of Alzheimer's disease.

Alzheimer's disease is a form of progressive dementia which destroys the cells in the brain, causing it to shrink. There are different stages of Alzheimer's which can take years or decades to progress. However, recent research has found that there are many lifestyle changes that can prevent, delay or alter the course of the disease.

At a meeting of American Academy of Neurology, Dr Rajan Duara from Mount Sinai Medical Center in Florida, presented a study where individuals over the age of 60 with a high-risk gene for Alzheimer's were studied.

Those who were heavy drinkers (more than two drinks a day) developed Alzheimer's five years earlier than others. Also, those who were heavy smokers (more than 20 cigarettes per day) developed Alzheimer's two years earlier.

These findings led Dr Duara to say, "It's possible that if we can reduce or eliminate heavy smoking and drinking, we could substantially delay the onset of Alzheimer's disease for people and reduce the number of people who have Alzheimer's at any point in time." Such a delay is significant. Because even a five-year stalling of Alzheimer's would lead to nearly a 50% reduction in the total number of Alzheimer's cases.

In India, the burden of Alzheimer's is significantly less than that in the West. Among adults in their 70s, the rate of Alzheimer's is 4.4 times lower than that of the United States.

Reasons for this lower rate are unclear. Some suspect it may be the under-recognition of the disease or a delay in seeking medical care. However, others contend it may be the spices in the Indian diet which may be protective.

Studies have found that cur -cumin, an ingredient found in turmeric (haldi), reduces the tangling of brain cells and breaks up existing plaques in experimental models of mice. It is thought that this protective effect of turmeric may be partially responsible for a lower Alzheimer's rate in India.

Whatever the reason, it is important to realize that simple lifestyle changes such as a good diet, physical and mental exercises along with reduced alcohol intake and cessation of smoking can alter our risk of an incurable and devastating disease of the mind.

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