

Saving on Eye Care; Bargains and Risks

Why cutting costs on eye care sometimes goes too far.

June 8, 2012 - In a tough economy, saving money is on everyone's mind. But when it comes to eye care, experts say that what you do to save money today may put you at risk of much higher costs in the future.

As people try to ration their income, they will often choose to skip their routine eye exam. It's penny-wise and health care-foolish.

Don't Skimp on Health Care for Your Eyes

According to the CDC, 61 million Americans are at high risk of losing their eyesight, yet only half that number saw an eye doctor in the previous year.

Many people measure the health of their eyes with their ability to see, that is the biggest misconception. If they don't have vision problems now, or they have glasses that correct their vision, they often believe that their eyes are doing just fine.

The trouble is, blinding diseases such as glaucoma, macular degeneration, and diabetic retinopathy, the top cause of blindness among U.S. adults; often don't have any noticeable symptoms until after the disease has progressed to a point where the damage is irreversible. Caught early, however, many eye diseases can be treated before they do permanent harm.

Ophthalmologist Mark Fromer, MD, agrees.

"There are all kinds of systemic diseases, but people like to think it is all about eyeglasses and don't see the bigger picture," says Dr. Fromer, who practices at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York and is the eye surgeon for the New York Rangers hockey team.

Dr. Fromer says that patient education plays a big role in how often people see the eye doctor, but budget is an important factor as well. When he talks to patients, he puts eye health in perspective by comparing it to skydiving and brain surgery.

"You don't want a budget parachute or a budget neurologist, do you?" Dr. Fromer says.

The American Optometric Association recommends adults ages 18-60 who have no risks for eye disease have an eye examination every two years. Adults 18-60 at risk for eye disease should get an eye exam every one to two years or as recommended by your eye doctor. Those who are ages 61 and older should get an eye exam annually or as recommended by your eye doctor.

"There are lots of blinding diseases without symptoms up front," Dr. Fromer says. "That's why it is so important to come in early and be tested."