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Dr. Nathan Hilbrands DDS, Miranda Hilbrands RDH





# HEALTHY Eye Care HABITS

Having healthy eyes can sometimes come down to smarter choices. There are a few simple, yet critical ways you can protect your sight, from having regular exams to dietary changes.

In some cases, injury or illness play a role. Family history can also be a direct indicator of problems ahead. Absent those outside influences, however, you can go a long way toward healthier eyes by following these helpful tips.

## REGULAR EXAMS

It's easy to take eye health for granted. It's also not uncommon for small but worrisome changes to go virtually unnoticed with our sight. That's why it's so important to schedule regular comprehensive eye exams with an eye care professional. Some eye diseases, including age-related macular degeneration and diabetic eye disease, don't have any warning signs. A dilated exam is the only way to diagnose these issues in the critical early stages. Tests will also help make sure that glasses aren't needed or if you should change your prescription strength.

## EATING RIGHT

Diets rich in dark, leafy greens like spinach, collard greens or kale have been shown to improve eye health, according to researchers. There are also ben-

efits in eating fish that boast higher levels of omega-3 fatty acids, like tuna, salmon and halibut. Being overweight is also a risk factor in failing eye sight, because it increases your risk of developing diabetes or diabetic eye disease. Consult a physician if you need more guidance on creating a meal plan that bolsters eye health.

## PROTECTIVE EYEWEAR

Safety glasses, shields, goggles and eye guards are critical for those who participate in certain sports, jobs involving machinery and activities like yard work where material might fly into our eyes. Most of these protective lenses are now made of polycarbonate, which is some 10 times stronger than conventional plastics. You can find this safety equipment at sporting goods and outdoors stores, or at your local eye care office. Sunglasses are also important in protecting your eyes from day-to-day exposure to harmful ultraviolet rays. Look for glasses that specifically block UV-A and UV-B radiation.

## STOP SMOKING

If you haven't started smoking, don't start. If you already smoke, be aware that the risks aren't limited to your lungs. Smoking has been linked to increasing instances of cataracts, macular degeneration and optic-nerve damage. All of these issues can lead to blindness.



# OVERCOMING *Fear* OF THE DENTIST

Some 40 million Americans don't take advantage of this critical health service. They most often cite anxiety and fear over the process, according to the American Dental Association.

But these trusted professionals are on hand to ensure your well-being through dental health. By putting off critical appointments, examinations and procedures, you're ensuring worse outcomes — and ironically enough, the likelihood of a lot more trips to the dentist so corrective measures can be taken.

Here's how to deal with whatever lingering fears you may have.

## HAVE OPEN DISCUSSIONS

As with many anxieties, the best approach to overcoming worry about going to the dentist is to confront your fears head on. Forging a better relationship with your dentist, as well as a the hygienist and the rest of their staff, will help personalize the experience. You'll build trust as you get to know the folks who actually conduct these exams, cleanings and any needed procedures.

Be honest about your fears, so that they can be addressed before getting started. Creating a comforting so-called "bedside manner" is part of a dentist's training, just as with any other doctor's. If you go through a process of getting to know them better, and still feel lingering uncertainty, then it may be time to begin looking for another dentist.

## BEFORE YOU GO

Ask friends and family for their recommenda-



tion, with a focus on your particular worries. Once you settle on a dentist, think about the timing. If possible, schedule your visit for a period when time isn't an overriding concern, since that can be a pressure point too. For instance, you will probably need a larger window than the average lunch break or the hour before work begins. Avoid caffeine prior your appointment, since this stimulant can make you feel anxious. On the other hand, high-protein foods can have a calming impact.

## DURING YOUR VISIT

There are also soothing approaches to your visit that can help ease any lingering worries. Breathe regularly, slowly and deeply during dental procedures, both to help along the flow of oxygen but also to lower your heart rate and tendency to panic. Worried about what you might see? In some cases, you may be allowed to listen to a favorite podcast or playlist through your earbuds. Sit back and lose yourself. Offices may have television programming that could provide a distraction, as well.

## MEET THE DOCTORS

YOUR CARE TEAM AT EMBRACE DENTISTRY OF BROOKINGS



• Dr. Hillary Van Dyke



• Dr. Leeann Diercks



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# Step-by-Step HEALTH PLAN

The American Dental Association has narrowed down the four things you must do to maintain good dental health. Brushing and flossing is important, but that's just the beginning of your journey to a healthier mouth. Good hygiene relies on regular attention with the right tools, a recommended diet to strengthen teeth and regular visits to the dentist. Here's a look.

## CONSISTENT BRUSHING

Experts confirm that everyone should brush their teeth at least twice each day, in the morning and at night, in order to get the best results. If you are on a hybrid schedule or can squeeze in a quick trip home, brushing after lunch is even better. But the quality of what you use, in some ways, is as important as keeping this schedule. Use fluoride-enriched toothpaste that's been approved by the Food and Drug Administration. Check your toothbrush often for signs of wear and tear, and discard it if the bristles are beginning to fray. No matter what, replace your toothbrush every three to four months.

## DAILY FLOSSING

Floss your teeth or use a related interdental cleaner at least once a day. Regular brushing is important, but can't reach into some tucked away places in between teeth. Germs hide in these tight spaces between teeth and your gums, creating a breeding ground that can lead to huge dental issues later on down the road. The regular removal of small food particles and plaque helps ward off tooth decay.



## HEALTHY DIET

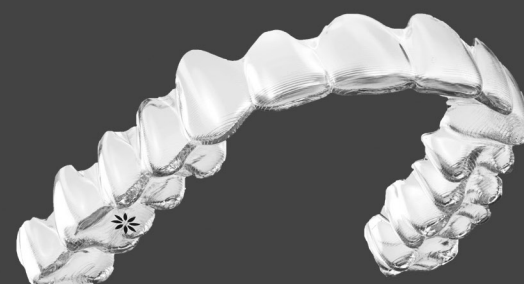
Those who brush and floss regularly may still be at risk of cavities, depending on what you eat — and even when. Limit snacks between meals as much as possible, since the American Dental Association notes that many of these snacks are sugary — and most people don't brush or floss afterward. Cavity-causing material can be left behind, and often at a far higher rate than with a well-balanced meal. High sugar drinks can also contribute to bacteria growth and the breaking down of the tooth surface.

## REGULAR VISITS TO YOUR DENTIST

There's still one more required step on your way to a healthier mouth: visit the dentist. These experts on oral health can help with early identification of issues like tooth decay and gum disease, while providing timely preventative advice and care. Plus a professional deep cleaning reaches places even a toothbrush and floss can't. You'll ultimately save money and time, since these visual exams and X-rays keep minor issues from unwittingly evolving into major ones.



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# WHY IT'S IMPORTANT TO Floss

Even regularly brushing can't get to certain hard-to-reach places. Recommended once-a-day flossing can happen before or after brushing.

Recent polling found that a little over half of respondents chose to floss beforehand, while the rest did so afterward. The American Dental Association has confirmed that it doesn't really matter – as long as you are flossing.

## WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

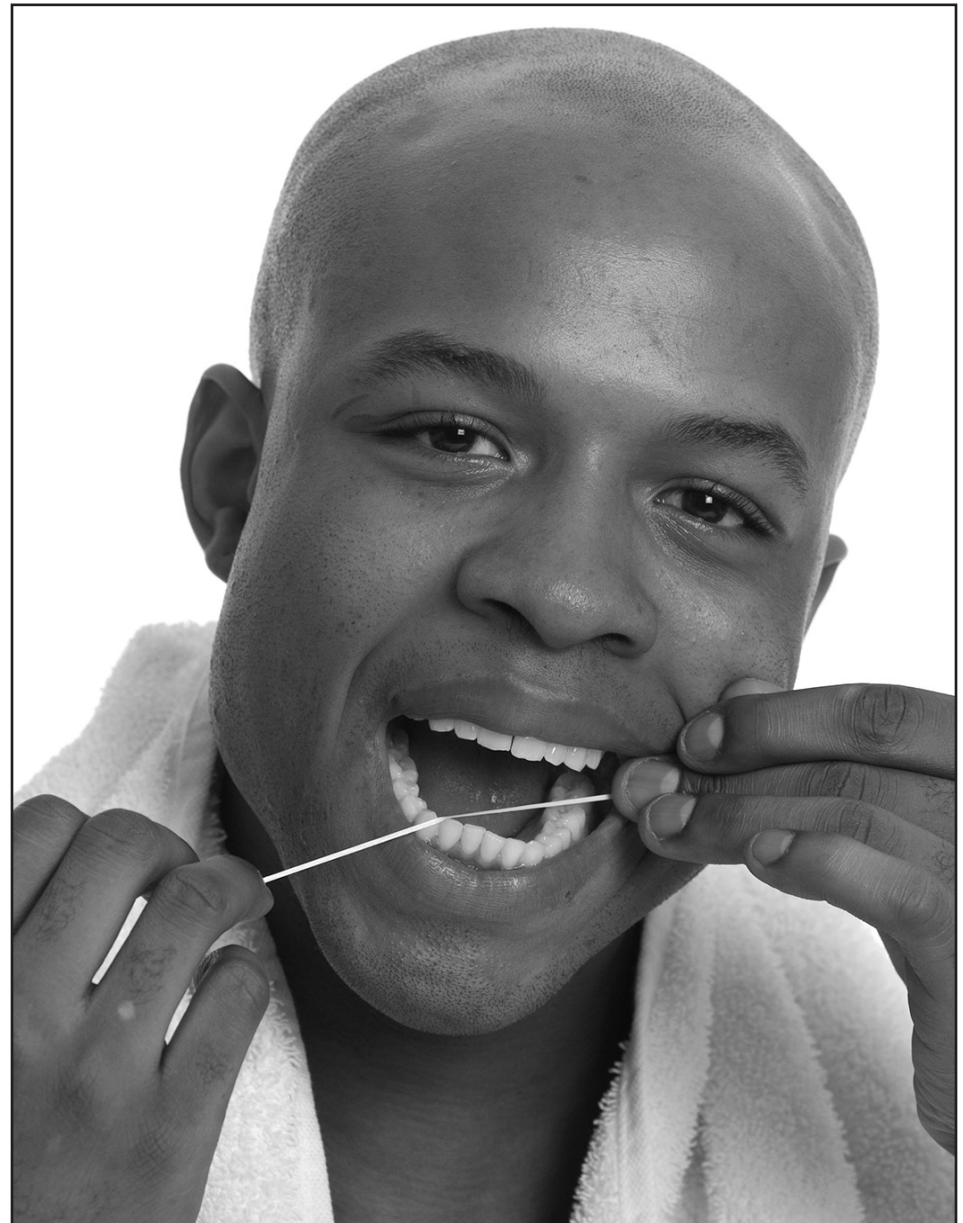
Flossing is your best defense against dental issues in tight, out-of-the-way spots where your toothbrush simply can't go. You'll be reducing your chances for cavities, removing plaque from below the gum line that can develop into tartar, and helping to prevent gingivitis – which can progress into gum disease. The problem many have is making time for flossing during a busy day. Taking care of your dental health may require waking up a little earlier, or staying up a little later – or perhaps even bringing floss to work so that you can handle this important chore during your lunch break. These small efforts will make a big difference in the long run.

## HOW TO DO IT

Only about half of Americans regularly floss, according to the American Dental Association, and many of those who do floss are not taking the proper approach to ensure good dental health. Here's the proper way to do it: Pull out a large section of floss – 18 or more inches – so that you can wind it around fingers on each hand. Gently guide the string between your teeth, making sure to floss between all of them. Hold the floss against your teeth tightly, rubbing the sides while moving the floss away from the gums.

## TEACHING LITTLE ONES

Once you've become a flossing pro, pass this important habit on to your children, nieces or nephews and younger cousins. In some cases, you might even be the first person to pass along the importance of flossing as well as a brushing their teeth. Parents or guardians should handle flossing in their earliest years, helping out until they develop their own good habits. The gen-



erally assumed age is 10, because that's when kids have usually developed the needed dexterity. Reassure them that it's not painful, while discussing the health benefits. If they are feeling pain while flossing – or if you are – slow down and take it easy.



**Children should be  
seen for their  
first dental exam  
by age 2.**

*Make your appointment today.*



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## FINDING THE *Right* GLASSES

So you've gotten a new prescription. Now what?

Their principal purpose is to correct a vision problem. But glasses also need to provide comfort and fashion, without breaking the bank.

If you're having trouble reading street signs or billboards, or find yourself squinting or with blurred vision, it's time to book an appointment with a trusted eye care professional. They'll perform a series of tests before prescribing corrective lenses.

Next you'll have to decide which lens material, added features and frames are right for you.

### LENS CHOICES

They still call them glasses, but in truth lenses are manufactured using a number of different materials these days. Glass lenses made the frames

too heavy — and they were, of course, easily damaged. More alarmingly, a broken lens put the wearer at risk of damage to the eye from shards of glass. Today, lenses are more typically made of high-index plastics, which provide the thinnest possible lens while also boasting a pleasing lightness and great affordability. The doctor will offer advice on which material is right in your particular situation.

### FRAME CONSIDERATIONS

These new prescription glasses will likely sit on your nose for long periods of time each day. That means that comfort is key, but so is the look since they will become part of your overall wardrobe.

First, determine whether your prescription or insurance places some limit on the size, kind or brand of frames. Then focus in on the frames that fit within those parameters, in consultation with an

optician. Pay close attention to how they fit on your ears, and whether they blend well with your particular facial features. Try on as many as you need to until finding just the right blend of function and fashion.

### AFFORDABILITY

Individual health insurance companies offer an incredibly wide variety of coverage plans, some of which take care of most or all of your eye care. On the other hand, other policies have very strict rules about how much they'll cover. There may be restrictions, for instance, on how often you can get new frames. They might require you to pay for add-on options that help with scratches or glare. The average cost of prescription glasses will typically run into the hundreds of dollars, so it's important to know what you're responsible for prior to deciding. Those high-end frames may have to wait.



# HOW TO PREVENT *Loss of Vision*

Millions suffer from corrective vision loss, some of them needlessly. Injury and disease can't always be prevented, but good habits can help ensure optimal vision for others.

Ophthalmology experts offer a range of tips to help prevent loss of vision, but it's important to discuss your plan with a local physician so that a custom plan can be created that addresses your particular situation. Their dilated eye exam will provide the most complete picture of your overall eye health.

Meanwhile, here's a list of generally recommended tips:

## EYE PROTECTION

Shielding your eyes from harmful ultraviolet rays or particles and projectiles is one of the easiest ways to combat loss of vision. Sunglasses with UV-blocking lenses can prevent damage to the retina that may lead to the development of cataracts. They also protect the sensitive skin around your eyes, providing a barrier against skin cancer and wrinkles.

Protective eyewear can also help keep you from becoming one of the millions of people who injure their eyes each year, according to estimates from the American Academy of Ophthalmology. Sports, home improvement projects and even yard work provide ample opportunity to damage your eyes. Wear protective glasses, shields or other gear when there is an increased chance of injury.



## HEALTHY CHOICES

Poor dietary choices or dangerous habits like smoking can cause known health issues to your body, but they also have an adverse impact on your vision.

Tobacco has been linked with increased instances of age-related macular degeneration, according to the American Academy of Ophthalmology. Studies consistently show that macular degeneration happens more among those who smoke or once smoked than those who never did. Diets high in leafy greens, vitamins E and C, zeaxanthin, omega-3 fatty acids, zinc and lutein are

less likely to have issues with their sight — including age-related macular degeneration.

## EYE CARE

Be particularly careful around your home when employing the hazardous chemicals found in bleach, oven cleaners and solvents. Splatter from cooking with hot grease or oil also presents an every-day danger. Be especially aware of the dangers of misusing your contact lenses. Don't sleep in those that aren't approved for overnight use, don't use expired solutions or substitutes like water or saliva. Pay close attention to how long disposable versions are approved for wear.

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