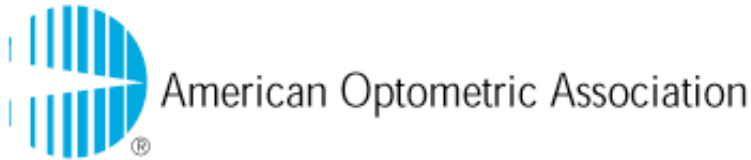


Source: <http://www.aoa.org/x11023.xml>



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contacts:

Emily Krone

O: 312-255-3090

emily.krone@hillandknowlton.com

AMERICAN EYE-Q® SURVEY INDICATES STRONG NEED TO EDUCATE CONSUMERS ABOUT EYE HEALTH

The American Optometric Association emphasizes the importance of regular, comprehensive eye exams as part of overall vision protection

- **Third Annual American Optometric Association American Eye-Q® Survey Executive Summary**

ST. LOUIS, MO, Oct. 9, 2008 –Too many Americans are not paying enough attention to their eyesight and overall eye health, according to a new survey by the American Optometric Association (AOA).

The AOA's 2008 American Eye-Q® survey, which assesses public knowledge and understanding of a wide range of issues related to eye and visual health, showed that most Americans – 81 percent of respondents – wear contact lenses, eyeglasses or both. At the same time, however, 26 percent have not visited an eye doctor or eye care specialist within the past two years, as recommended by the AOA.

Since many eye and vision problems have no obvious signs or symptoms, people often are unaware that a problem exists. Early diagnosis and treatment of eye and vision problems are important to maintain good vision and eye health and, when possible, prevent vision loss.

"Every adult should have a comprehensive eye exam at least every two years, but it's even more important for people who already use corrective lenses," said Dr. James Kirchner, optometrist and AOA's Eye Health Expert. "Too often we see people who have put off eye exams because they assume they just need a different lens prescription, when they really have a more serious problem. With eye diseases and disorders, as with most health issues, early detection and treatment are often the keys to avoiding permanent problems."

Comprehensive eye exams are designed to:

- Evaluate the functional status of the eyes, taking into account special vision demands and needs
- Assess vision health and related systemic health conditions
- Determine a diagnosis (or diagnoses)
- Formulate a treatment and management plan
- Counsel and educate patients about their visual, ocular and related systemic health care status, including recommendations for treatment, management and future care

Most Americans are unaware that comprehensive eye exams can detect more than just vision

problems. Sixty-two percent didn't know that signs of diabetes can be detected by an optometrist. Other diseases and conditions that respondents did not realize can be detected through a comprehensive eye exam include hypertension (not recognized by 71 percent), brain tumors (75 percent), cancer (78 percent), cardiovascular diseases (80 percent) and multiple sclerosis (90 percent).

Aging Eyes

Baby boomers need to pay particular attention to eye problems. The American Optometric Association recommends annual eye examinations for everyone over age 60.

It's a fact of life that vision changes as you age, and baby boomers – Americans born between 1946 and 1964 – are at the stage when vision problems often begin. But these changes don't have to compromise a person's lifestyle.

According to the American Eye-Q® survey, 72 percent of respondents age 55 and older began experiencing changes in vision between the ages of 40 and 45. Their top concerns about the effects of vision problems include not being able to live independently, cited by 48 percent; losing the ability to drive, 23 percent; and being unable to read, 21 percent.

Health problems in other parts of the body can affect vision as well. Individuals with diabetes or hypertension (high blood pressure), or people taking certain medications that have eye-related side effects, are at greater risk for developing vision problems.

Therefore, regular comprehensive eye exams are especially important later in life, when more people develop these types of chronic conditions and begin taking medications more frequently. Unfortunately, some people over 60 experience loss of sight beyond the normal, age-related vision changes. The good news is that more than half of survey respondents were aware of many of the risks of age-related eye diseases. The bad news is that the survey revealed limited understanding of the fact that without treatment, some eye diseases result in blindness. Macular degeneration, glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy are among the age-related eye health conditions that can lead to permanent vision loss.

Rehabilitative services can give people with conditions such as low vision the assistance and resources needed to regain their independence and to help preserve remaining vision. A doctor of optometry can develop a rehabilitation program to help people with low vision live and work more effectively, efficiently and safely. Treatment options commonly include spectacle-mounted magnifiers, miniature hand-held or spectacle-mounted telescopes, and video magnification devices that enlarge reading materials on a video display monitor.

The American Eye-Q® survey revealed how respondents age 55 and older are addressing their age-related vision problems. More than half, or 60 percent, said they schedule frequent eye exams; 28 percent said they limit their night driving; 29 percent are increasing the nutrients necessary for healthy eyes; and 9 percent purchase books and other materials in large print.

Common Misconceptions and Other Findings

As in past Eye-Q® surveys, Americans continue to value their ability to see. Most respondents indicated that they worry about losing their vision (38 percent) more than their memory (31 percent), their ability to walk (14 percent) or their hair (8 percent).

Many respondents also held misconceptions about behaviors that can damage the eyes. For example, 71 percent incorrectly believe that reading under dim light can cause eye damage. Other misunderstandings about the causes of eye damage included sitting too close to the television, cited by 66 percent; and rubbing the eyes. While these behaviors can cause eye strain, they don't cause physical damage to the eye or eye sight.

Nutrition is one promising means of protecting the eyes. However, respondents are unaware of what to eat to help their eyes. For example, only 2 percent of respondents correctly chose spinach as the best food for one's eye health. Almost half, or 48 percent, believe the misconception that carrots are best for their eye health. Lutein and zeaxanthin, found in dark green leafy vegetables

including spinach, help to protect against cataracts and age-related macular degeneration.

Fun Facts

Americans consider their eyes and eyesight important for reasons beyond health and vision. The survey indicated that 32 percent of respondents report they receive more compliments on their eyes than other features, and 42 percent said they consider color to be their eyes' best attribute.

For additional information on eye health, please visit www.aoa.org.

About the survey

The third annual American Eye-Q® survey was created and commissioned in conjunction with Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates (PSB). From May 17-19, 2008, using an online methodology, PSB interviewed 1,001 Americans 18 years and older who embodied a nationally representative sample of U.S. general population. (Margin of error at 95 percent confidence level.)

About the American Optometric Association (AOA):

The American Optometric Association represents approximately 36,000 doctors of optometry, optometry students and paraoptometric assistants and technicians. Optometrists serve patients in nearly 6,500 communities across the country, and in 3,500 of those communities are the only eye doctors. Doctors of optometry provide two-thirds of all primary eye care in the United States.

American Optometric Association doctors of optometry are highly qualified, trained doctors on the frontline of eye and vision care who examine, diagnose, treat and manage diseases and disorders of the eye. In addition to providing eye and vision care, optometrists play a major role in a patient's overall health and well-being by detecting systemic diseases such as diabetes and hypertension.

Prior to optometry school, optometrists typically complete four years of undergraduate study, culminating in a bachelor's degree. Required undergraduate coursework for pre-optometry students is extensive and covers a wide variety of advanced health, science and mathematics. Optometry school consists of four years of post-graduate, doctoral study concentrating on both the eye and systemic health. In addition to their formal training, doctors of optometry must undergo annual continuing education to stay current on the latest standards of care. For more information, visit www.aoa.org.

[About the AOA](#) | [Policies & Disclaimers](#) | [Contact AOA](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Sponsorship](#) | [Optometry's Meeting®](#)

©2006-08 American Optometric Association. All Rights Reserved.