

Healthy Vision Month 2021

Healthy Vision Month 2021: Maintaining Sight of What is Important during a Pandemic

Healthy Vision Month 2021 befalls us at a volatile time on account of COVID-19, but comes as a stellar reminder of the importance of an adept healthcare system. It is estimated that globally at least 2.2 billion people are visually impaired or blind, of whom 1 billion have a preventable or unaddressed visual impairment¹. In Trinidad and Tobago, the leading cause of moderate to severe vision impairment is uncorrected refractive error. Other leading causes are glaucoma, cataracts and diabetes².

Systemic conditions can have ocular manifestations when neglected or undiagnosed. Health advocacy is crucial in remodeling local and global statistics. Healthcare professionals, specifically physicians, are in an impeccable position for advocating for regular eye examinations to those who have systemic ailments.

Healthy Vision

So, what exactly does it mean to have healthy vision and how does one attain and maintain healthy vision? According to the World Health Organisation, health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity³. Additionally, the pandemic has also taught us that a lapse in one of these areas ultimately leads to a domino effect if intervention fails to occur. Similarly, our systemic ailments can lead to ocular complications and when these have significantly progressed, can begin to affect our abilities to function; from our daily tasks, to our work, our social and mental states.

Shielding our Vision

It is easy to assume that once our eyes *feel* healthy, that they *are* healthy. However, a significant amount of diseases do not have any warning signs. Consequently, it is advised to have an eye exam which can help to detect any changes in the health of the eyes and visual acuity.

As we grow older, the risk of developing some eye conditions increases. Some other important risk factors include: obesity, a family history of eye diseases and smoking. Health conditions such as diabetes and hypertension can result in eye diseases when they are not well-managed. Another important aspect of maintaining healthy vision is awareness of family systemic and ocular conditions as they can help one assess their risks and mitigate as needed.

While living in a tropical climate certainly has its benefits when it comes to weather, we must also protect our eyes from harmful ultraviolet radiation by wearing sunglasses that protect against UVA and UVB.

Globally, myopia is the leading cause of avoidable vision impairment, and is projected to affect nearly half of the world's population by 2050. Its impact can be significant and further increases a person's risk of developing conditions such as glaucoma, cataracts, retinal detachments and myopic macular degenerations. As such, global campaigns have begun shedding light on management techniques to slow the progression by proactive advocating as well as intervention. Eye examinations, particularly for kids, can help them benefit by identifying, correcting and possibly slowing the progression of myopia, once detected.

Vision impairment and blindness has a colossal psychological and economic impact on the patient, their loved ones, as well as society. Therefore, we must strive to reduce the percentage of our population that is affected by preventable blindness. Recently published data by the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB) Vision Atlas, suggest that 90% of vision loss come from low to middle income countries. Vision loss may be attributed to socioeconomic disadvantage and as such, the affordability and accessibility of eye care must be designed in a way to reach different socioeconomic classes.

Here are a few tips on how you can maintain **Healthy Vision!**

- Get a comprehensive eye exam and do it as regularly as advised by your eyecare provider!
- Sunglasses please!- Wear those sunglasses when outdoors.
- Eat a balanced diet.
- Use protective eyewear when at work or on the field!
- Practice the 20/20/20 rule when performing near work: every 20 minutes, focus on an object 20 feet away for 20 seconds!
- Wear your glasses and/or contact lenses as prescribed by your eyecare provider.

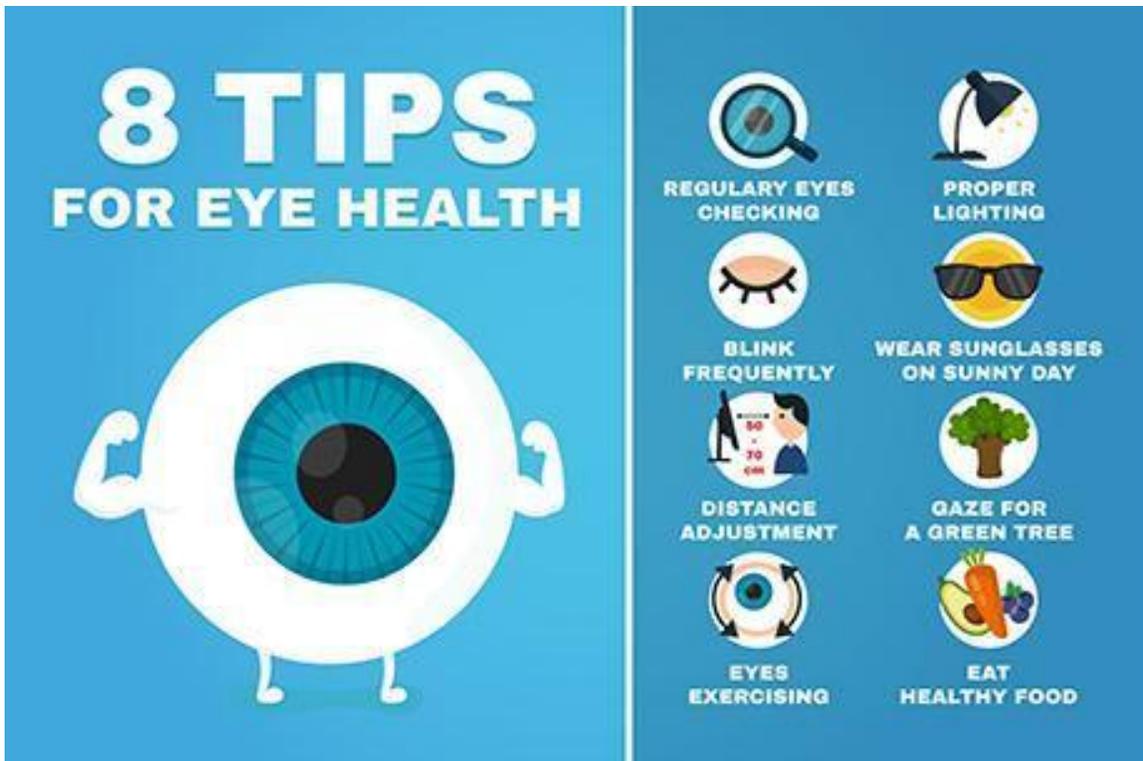


Image 1: Infographic



Image 2: The 20-20-20 Rule explained.

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Vandana received her BSc. Optometry (Hons.) from the University of the West Indies, where she graduated as the 'Most Outstanding Student' of the Class of Optometry 2018 and Valedictorian of the Faculty of Medical Sciences in 2018. Apart from her current prowess, she also holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Cell & Molecular Biology from the University of South Florida. She aspires to leave a mark in the profession and do her part in providing the best primary eye care to those in need, in our society.

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Stephanie Boodoo-Ramsaroop is the TTOA President-Elect for 2021-2021. She qualified as an Optometrist in 2018 from the UWI School of Optometry and currently works with Dalton-Brown Optometrists.

Optometry is her passion, being her dream career for as long as she can remember. Stephanie loves taking care of her patients and helping them see to their full potential.