



Live Healthy Georgia – Seniors Taking Charge!

February 2008 Newsletter



AMD/Low Vision Awareness Month

By Mindy Bell, BS

As we age, many people experience changes in vision. Some changes are normal and can be corrected. Perhaps you needed reading glasses after age 50 or you recently had cataracts removed from one or both eyes to help correct your vision. Some eye conditions, however, cannot be fully corrected and people must make adaptations in their daily lives to cope with poor vision. Low vision, or vision impairment that is not correctible by standard glasses, contact lenses, surgery, or medicine and that interferes with the ability to perform everyday tasks, is an issue for some older people. Activities such as reading, shopping, and cooking may become more difficult if you have low vision.

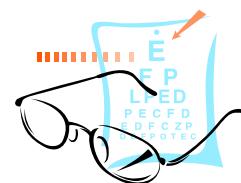
Simply getting older is usually not a cause of low vision. A variety of eye diseases associated with being older, however, can lead to low vision. Age-related macular degeneration, glaucoma, and diabetic retinopathy are common contributors to vision impairments. Depending on the cause and area of the eye affected, people

experience different symptoms and can have varying visual capabilities.

One of the major causes of low vision is age-related macular degeneration. This eye disease affects the retina, or the part of the eye that sends signals to the brain that allows us to see images. The macula is a part of the retina responsible for detail, color, and daylight vision. When this area is damaged, it becomes hard to see things that are straight ahead in your central line of vision. Imagine seeing a blurred spot when you look straight ahead, making it difficult to see what is directly in front of you.

Low vision can affect many aspects of everyday life. It can make activities such as matching clothes, sewing, cooking, writing, reading, and getting around the home a challenge. It can also increase the risk of falls and fractures. The good news is that many resources and devices are available to help. Most people with low vision still have some usable vision and can benefit from devices and services that are available.

Live Healthy Georgia – Seniors Taking Charge!



Visual rehabilitation can help people learn techniques and the use of devices to maximize use of vision that they still have. Eye care professionals trained in low vision can assess an individual's usable vision and then make recommendations for devices and services that can help. Many devices have been developed to help people with low vision perform a variety of their daily activities. Special magnifying and telescopic lenses, large print reading materials, check writing guides, and other optical and adaptive devices can help people remain independent.

Advocacy efforts are underway to allow adaptive devices to be included as part of Medicare coverage. Medicare typically pays for low vision examinations by eye care professionals. Ask a professional about inexpensive alternatives and tips for performing daily activities if you are unable to purchase assistive devices. You can also do simple things, such as asking your pharmacist to use large print on your medication labels, and keeping items you might trip over off the floor around your home.

Your eyes are an important part of your body, so remember that regular dilated eye exams are important. Eye

care professionals can check for diseases and identify problems in their early stages. If you notice a sudden change in your vision, or have symptoms such as seeing wavy lines or blurry vision, you should contact your eye doctor immediately for a comprehensive evaluation. In general, aim to get a check-up from an eye care professional at least once per year.

For more information, see: NIH Senior Health, Low Vision, at <http://nihseniorhealth.gov>

The National Eye Institute, NIH, See for Yourself: Vision and Older Adults Education Program, at

<http://www.nei.nih.gov/nehep/lowvis.asp>.

In honor of sweet potato month, enjoy this brightly colored, eye health-friendly vegetable using the recipe given below.

Maple Mashed Sweet Potatoes (Serves 2)

Ingredients:

- 1 medium sweet potato
- 2 tsp soft tub margarine
- 1 Tbsp reduced-sugar maple syrup
- ¼ tsp cinnamon
- Dash of black pepper

Directions:

1. Bake sweet potato in microwave until tender and let sit until cool enough to handle.
2. Split potato in half, scoop out the insides, and place in a small bowl.
3. Mash potato with the margarine, maple syrup, cinnamon, and pepper using a fork or masher (if potatoes seem too thick, add a small amount of milk or water until the desired consistency is reached).