

Blindness Knows No Boundaries

The World Health Organization estimates that 37 million people are blind worldwide and an additional 124 million have vision so poor that routine activities become impossible. Yet an estimated 75 percent of those suffering don't have to be blind. Millions could be cured right now because their blindness is caused by conditions that are easily treatable or preventable.

While the overwhelming majority of avoidable blindness occurs in the developing world, people in the United States are in no way immune. More than three million Americans aged 40 and older are currently blind or visually impaired. As the American population ages, these numbers are projected to double over the next 20 years and dramatically challenge our health care delivery system.

Celebrating 25 years of service, ORBIS International is a global development organization whose mission is to preserve and restore sight by strengthening the capacity of local partners in their efforts to prevent and treat blindness.



On March 1, 2007, the Empire State Building's Tower lights shine blue and white from sunset until midnight in honor of ORBIS International's 25th Anniversary. At 20:20 (8:20 pm) 28 million people who are needlessly blind are commemorated by the darkening of the Tower lights for 28 minutes.

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Uncover the Truth About Blindness



Eye-Q Test

Test your Eye-Q by answering these questions about the magnitude and causes of blindness and visual impairment.

1. What easily correctible eye condition, if left untreated, is the leading cause of blindness in the world?

- a. Glaucoma
- b. Diabetic retinopathy
- c. Cataract
- d. Strabismus

2. Ultraviolet (UV) protection in eyeglass lenses is essential for maintaining healthy eyes.

- a. True
- b. False

3. Which of the following conditions is most likely to affect vision, even leading to blindness, if left unchecked?

- a. Asthma
- b. Diabetes
- c. Allergy
- d. Malaria

4. It has been called the “thief of sight” because it causes painless, progressive vision loss and affects one in forty people over 40 years of age, including up to 65 million people worldwide.

- a. Glaucoma
- b. Pink eye
- c. Flu
- d. Cataract

5. Which factors can contribute to your risk of macular degeneration, a condition that damages the central part of the retina responsible for the center field of vision and the ability to see detail?

- a. Age
- b. Family history
- c. Cardiovascular disease
- d. All of the above

Tips to Protect Your Eyes

To keep your eyes healthy, visit your eye doctor regularly for routine eye exams and seek immediate medical attention if you suffer injury or any symptoms that could indicate eye disease.

In addition, take these basic steps to safeguard your eyesight:

- **Wear sunglasses with UV protection. Ultraviolet rays can damage your eyes just as they can your skin.** This eye damage can result in cataracts – a highly treatable form of blindness.

- **If you have diabetes, schedule regular checkups to guard against diabetic retinopathy.** This frequent complication damages the blood vessels in the retina and is becoming one of the leading causes of blindness worldwide.

- **Because one in forty individuals over age 40 have glaucoma, adults should have eye pressure checked at least once every two years.** Glaucoma can cause irreversible damage to the optic nerve and retinal fibers if left untreated.

- **If you're over age 55, pay close attention to blurring or distortion of objects at the center of your field of vision.** This could be a sign of age-related macular degeneration — the leading cause of blindness in the United States.

How You Can Help

ORBIS International supports educational efforts around the world to alert individuals to the steps they can take to prevent blindness. To learn how you can help make a difference, visit www.orbis.org.

ANSWER KEY:

1. The answer is c.

A cataract is a clouding of your eye's normally transparent lens. This clouding prevents you from seeing clearly. Cataracts account for 48 percent of the world's blindness. Cataracts can be removed with surgery but leave an optical error that must be corrected with glasses, contact lenses or intraocular lenses.

2. The answer is true.

Sunglasses with UV protection minimize your exposure to the sun's harmful ultraviolet radiation. Just as your skin needs protection to prevent sunburn and skin cancer, so, too, do your eyes need protection to avoid UV-related damage to your cornea, lens and retina.

3. The answer is b.

Diabetes affects your body from head to toe, and this includes your eyes. The most common eye complication of diabetes is diabetic retinopathy, which may result in poor vision or even blindness. Approximately 5 million individuals have diabetic retinopathy. By 2025, the World Health Organization estimates 300 million people will have diabetes, with half expected to eventually develop some level of retinopathy.

4. The answer is a.

Glaucoma occurs when the fluid inside your eyes fails to drain properly. This causes a rise in eye pressure and damage to the optic nerve. Unless this pressure is controlled, your vision will deteriorate. With early detection and treatment, most glaucoma patients can maintain good vision for life.

5. The answer is d.

Age, family history and cardiovascular disease are major risk factors for macular degeneration. Eating foods rich in antioxidants, kicking the smoking habit and getting regular eye exams may help prevent or delay the progression of macular degeneration.