

A Window to Your Health

Comprehensive annual eye exams may be a key to early detection of serious medical conditions

It has been said that the eyes are the windows to the soul. “The face is a picture of the mind, as the eyes are its interpreter,” said Roman philosopher and orator Cicero. To a well-trained eye physician, however, the eyes are the windows to a person’s health.



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A comprehensive annual eye exam not only helps a person to maintain or enhance his or her vision, but may also lead to the discovery of potentially serious systemic medical conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, lupus, sarcoid, rheumatoid arthritis or multiple sclerosis. In some cases, infectious diseases have even been discovered during comprehensive eye exams.

“While a comprehensive eye examination can lead to the discovery of serious eye or medical conditions, I view it as an opportunity to help a patient work to minimize those risk factors that are within our control to help them lead a longer and healthier life,” explains retina specialist Hetal D. Vaishnav, MD, director of clinical research at The Eye Institute for Medicine & Surgery.

“This is why we encourage every one of our patients to have at least a yearly examination that includes dilation of the eyes, which can yield detailed information about the person’s current health status as well as their likely future state of health.”

A thorough view

During a comprehensive eye examination, eye physicians use dilating drops that cause the muscles in the iris to relax and fully open, Dr. Vaishnav explains.

With the iris muscles relaxed and the pupil fully dilated (open), an eye physician can thoroughly inspect the blood vessels inside the back of the eye. “By performing a dilated retinal examination, we can detect changes that may be occurring

elsewhere in the body that relate to diabetes, high blood pressure or a whole host of other serious medical conditions,” notes Dr. Vaishnav. “The eyes are the only organ through which a physician may directly examine a patient’s blood vessels.”

Having one’s eyes dilated enables the eye physician to perform the most thorough examination. When one of the highly trained and experienced doctors at The Eye Institute for Medicine & Surgery performs a dilated eye exam, he or she is looking for conditions that are not easily detected during a standard eye exam. Left untreated, some of these conditions can cause significant vision loss or even blindness.

High-tech imaging

At the Center for Retinal Care at The Eye Institute for Medicine & Surgery, doctors combine thorough eye examination techniques with state-of-the-art digital imaging to ensure that each patient receives the very best care possible. Digital, high-definition retinal evaluations are revolutionizing the early detection and treatment of eye conditions such as macular diseases, retinal diseases and diabetic-related disorders.

“Not only does this approach enable us to diagnose some of the most serious eye conditions, but it can also yield a great deal of useful information regarding systemic conditions,” explains Gary J. Ganiban, MD, chief of vitreo-retinal diseases and surgery at The Eye Institute for Medicine & Surgery.

“Systemic diseases – those that affect multiple organs or the entire body – such as high blood pressure, diabetes, Graves’ disease, lupus, atherosclerosis, multiple sclerosis, rheumatoid arthritis or other autoimmune disorders, frequently cause changes in the eye that can show up as inflammation, small blood clots or swelling within the retina,” clarifies Dr. Ganiban.

“The good news is that by detecting these problems early, we are often able to help our patients maintain or regain their eyesight, and we are also able to coordinate care with their primary care physician and other specialists to help our patients achieve their best possible quality of life,” reports Dr. Vaishnav.

Dr. Vaishnav, Dr. Ganiban and cataract and glaucoma specialist James N. McManus, MD, serve as adjunct clinical professors at the Florida Institute of Technology, where they instruct



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Annual eye exams can yield important information about a patient’s health.

biomedical engineering students regarding anatomy, physiology, medicine and ophthalmology.

Disease and vision

Diabetes is a disease that affects more than 20 million Americans, but it is estimated that only 14 million have been diagnosed with the condition and receive regular medical care. Furthermore, of the group receiving care, perhaps as few as one-third receive regular eye examinations, Dr. Vaishnav reports.

For diabetics, the key to maintaining healthy vision is to see an eye physician regularly. Those who have diabetes – regardless of age – should at a minimum have an eye exam once a year.

Patients who have had diabetes for a number of years, as well as those who developed diabetes early in life, are at much greater risk of developing *retinopathy* – a form of bleeding in the back of the eye – or *diabetic macular edema*, a serious form of swelling and leakage of fluid in the back of the eye. If undiscovered and untreated, these conditions can lead to loss of vision or blindness.

In the vast majority of cases, if

diabetic retinopathy is detected and treated in its early stages, patients can maintain their vision or regain lost vision, Dr. Ganiban states.

Another condition that can cause serious vision problems if not caught early is *macular degeneration*, which is one of the leading causes of blindness in the United States.

Along with their colleagues at Bascom Palmer Eye Institute and the ophthalmology department at the University of Florida in Gainesville, Drs. Vaishnav and Ganiban were among the first eye physicians in the region to adopt newer medications that can be placed directly into a patient’s eye, as well as various laser therapies to slow the progression of, and in some cases reverse the effects of, macular degeneration.

“It’s really exciting when a patient tells me that for the first time in years they perceive that they are seeing better,” says Dr. Ganiban. “I know from personal experience that every moment of life is precious. I want my patients to know that I have done all that I can do to help them enjoy the things that are important to them.” **FHCN**

Comprehensive eye evaluations

When it comes to your eyesight, only the best will do. To schedule a comprehensive eye examination with one of the specialists at The Eye Institute for Medicine & Surgery, please call (321) 722-4443. There are three offices to serve you: 1995 W. NASA Blvd. in Melbourne, 150 S. Woods Drive in Rockledge and 5055 Babcock Street NE in Palm Bay.



Gary J. Ganiban, MD, is board certified by the American Board of Ophthalmology. He earned his Bachelor of Science degree from Bucknell University in Lewisburg, PA in 1985 and his Medical Doctor degree from Hahnemann University of Medicine in Philadelphia in 1990. He completed his internship at the University of Arizona in Tucson and residency at Maryland General Hospital, Jonas Friedenwald Ophthalmic Institute in Baltimore. Dr. Ganiban completed a fellowship in vitreo-retinal diseases and surgery at Louisiana State University Medical Center in New Orleans. He is a member of the American Academy of Ophthalmology, the Southern Medical Association and the Brevard County Medical Society, among others.



Hetal D. Vaishnav, MD, is board certified by the American Board of Ophthalmology. He earned his Bachelor of Science degree from Georgia State University in 1993 and Medical Doctor degree from the Morehouse School of Medicine in Atlanta in 1999. He then completed an internship in general surgery at the University of Florida followed by a residency in ophthalmology and fellowship in vitreo-retinal diseases and surgery. Dr. Vaishnav is a member of the American Academy of Ophthalmology, the Association for Research on Vision and Ophthalmology, the American Society of Retina Specialty and the Florida Society of Ophthalmology.

To schedule an appointment with one of the eye specialists at The Eye Institute for Medicine & Surgery, please call (321) 722-4443 or visit www.SeeBetterBrevard.com.

Appointments are available in the Rockledge, Melbourne and Palm Bay offices.