

The prevalence of ocular disease is relatively low for young adults; however, many eye diseases can initially develop without signs or symptoms. Therefore, having good visual acuity does not rule out their presence.²⁷ Glaucoma may begin to appear in this age group, particularly among African Americans. In addition, diabetes increasingly affects young adults and is a leading cause of blindness among Americans of working age. To ensure early detection of potentially sight-threatening vision disorders, and for young adults to maintain their visual efficiency and productivity, periodic examinations are needed.

CONSENSUS-BASED ACTION STATEMENT: Comprehensive eye and vision examinations are recommended annually for persons 18 through 39 years of age to optimize visual function, evaluate eye changes, and provide for the early detection of sight-threatening eye and systemic health conditions. Risk factors present may result in recommendations for more frequent evaluations.

Evidence Quality: There is a lack of published research to support or refute the use of this recommendation.

Benefits and Harms Assessment: Implementation of this recommendation is likely to result in earlier diagnosis of eye and vision problems and the prevention or reduction in vision loss in this age group. The benefits of this recommendation were established by expert consensus opinion.

- 40 through 64 years of age

The prevalence of refractive errors is related to age and varies with gender and race/ethnicity.⁹⁸ Changes in refractive error are not uncommon in persons 40 years or older.¹⁰⁵ Even low amounts of refractive error can cause significantly reduced vision, and if uncorrected, affect a person's independence, health-related quality of life, and well-being. A substantial portion of working age adults may have visually-significant undiagnosed refractive errors, and detection can be a major benefit in their personal and work lives and help to improve vision in later life.²²⁰ (Evidence Grade: D) Near vision problems due to refractive errors are also significant causes of reduced vision among people of working age.²²¹

The onset of presbyopia in this age group results in reduced ability to focus at near and intermediate distances. Uncorrected presbyopia can cause significant visual disability and have a negative impact on a person's quality of life. In most cases, presbyopia progresses gradually until individuals are unable to focus clearly at near for reading or other close activities without the aid of an optical correction. This progression continues in a predictable manner in this age group, necessitating periodic changes in the power of their near optical correction.

Uncorrected presbyopia has been poorly recognized as a cause for reduction in a person's health-related quality of life. This may be due to the perception that it affects individuals less significantly than eye disease or other eye conditions; however, reduced near vision due to uncorrected presbyopia matters just as much to quality of life as reduced distance visual acuity.²²²

Individuals in this age group are also at greater risk for eye diseases, including age-related macular degeneration, cataracts, diabetic retinopathy, and glaucoma. Since these diseases are often asymptomatic in the early treatable stages, regular eye examinations are an important means to prevent vision loss.²²³ (Evidence Grade: D)

Having insurance for eye care services increases the chances of having better vision outcomes. A study of adults in eight states found that persons 40 to 65 years of age, with or without visual impairment, who had an eye exam in the prior year, generally had better vision, as indicated by their ability to recognize friends across the street and to read a newspaper or magazine.²²⁴ (Evidence Grade: D) Early diagnosis and treatment of eye and vision problems may also reduce the cost burden of providing future care. These findings reinforce the benefits of an annual eye health and vision examination.