

Area Agency on Aging *Connections*

Vision and hearing require special attention as we age

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For *Pittsburgh Senior News*

While a balanced diet and regular exercise helps to maintain good health as we age, certain areas such as vision and hearing require special attention.

Vision

Two major eye disorders commonly affect seniors: glaucoma and cataracts. Glaucoma is a hereditary condition that develops when there's an increase of pressure within the eyeball, often damaging the optic nerve and diminishing vision. If detected early, glaucoma can be controlled with medication or surgery.

A cataract clouds the lens or membrane surrounding the eye so that less light reaches the retina. Cataracts can be removed by surgery or laser. Special corrective lenses or contact lenses can compensate for vision loss.

Here are some steps you can take to protect your vision.

Visit your eye doctor regularly

The best defense for vision loss is a regular eye examination. The Academy of Ophthalmology recommends regular eye exams for all seniors (especially those with a family history of eye disease) and diabetics. They recommend visiting an eye doctor even if you have no problems.

Make changes to help yourself see better

Small changes will help your vision as you age, such as:



- Wear sunglasses and a brimmed hat anytime you are outdoors in bright sunshine.

- Improve lighting around your house. Simply by replacing a 100-watt bulb with a 150-watt bulb in your lamps, you can reduce eye strain. Be sure that the fixture is designed for that wattage.

- Wear safety glasses when working with tools and using cleaning products in your house.

Take care of yourself

You can lower your risk of eye disease and vision loss if you:

- eat healthy foods.
- stay active.
- control your blood pressure, cholesterol levels, diabetes or other health concerns.
- quit smoking. Smoking is a major risk factor in the early onset of age-related macular degeneration.

Hearing

Hearing loss is one of the most common conditions that affect seniors. According to the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, one in three seniors ages 60 and older, and half of those older than 85, have hearing loss.

The institute recommends visiting your primary care physician if you think you have a hearing problem. Your doctor may refer you to a hearing professional like an otolaryngologist (a doctor who specializes in the ear, nose and throat) or an audiologist, who can measure your hearing. They usually work together to find the treatment that is right for you. There are plenty of treatments and devices available to help with your hearing loss. These are some of the most common ones:

- Hearing aids are worn in or behind the ear to make sounds louder. Ask your audiologist for a trial period with a few different hearing aids so you can find the one that works best for you. Personal listening systems help you hear while eliminating or lowering other noises around you. This can make it easier for you to hear someone in a crowded room or group setting.

- TV listening systems help you listen to the television or radio without being bothered by other surrounding noises.

- Direct audio input hearing aids are plugged into TVs, stereos, microphones, auditory trainers and radios to help you hear better.

- Telephone amplifying devices. If your hearing aid has a "T"



switch, talk to your phone company to see if they can give you a phone with an amplifying coil. The coil is activated as soon as you pick up the phone. It allows you to listen at a comfortable volume and helps lessen background noise. You can also buy a special type of phone receiver to make sounds louder on the phone.

- Auditorium-type assistive listening systems. Many public places like auditoriums and movie theaters have special sound systems for people with hearing loss. These listening systems will send sound directly to your ears.

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In this ACAA issue...

ACCESS and other services provide reliable senior transportation	16
Active senior encourages others to do the same	17
ACAAA Notes	18
Menu	18