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Joey McIntyre of New Kids On The Block opens up about the importance of family and support when tackling hearing health issues.

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CHALLENGES



ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY
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Many Canadians suffer from hearing issues, but by **seeking help and taking action**, they will find the solutions that they need.

Are you experiencing hearing loss? You’re not alone



Rex Banks
M.A. CCC-A, REG. CASLPO,
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“The consequences of undiagnosed and unmanaged hearing loss are significant across the age spectrum. Research links untreated hearing loss to depression, isolation, and withdrawal.”

Hearing loss is much more common than many Canadians think. Nearly 25 percent of adult Canadians have identified some form of hearing loss. While more than 50 percent of people over age 65 have hearing loss due to the aging process, it’s also estimated that 1 in 6 baby boomers have a hearing problem. With the swelling tide of the oldest baby boomers just starting to hit retirement age, hearing loss is bound to receive more attention in the future as society comes to grips with the impacts caused by this invisible disability.

What about teenagers — are they damaging their hearing? One study showed a 31 percent overall rise in the prevalence of hearing loss in teens aged 12 to 19 from 1988–1994 compared to 2005–2006. The use of MP3s and other voluntary exposure to noise by young people is expected to increase rates of hearing loss considerably in coming years. For our very youngest citizens, it is estimated that 3 in 1,000 infants are born with serious-to-profound hearing loss.

The importance of starting now
People with hearing loss often feel embarrassed and isolated. They often try to bluff their way through situations and deny that there is a problem.

Although there is overwhelming evidence that hearing aids can help, only 1 in 5 who need hearing aids use them. It has also been reported that individuals with hearing loss wait six to 10 years before they seek help, during which time the impact of hearing loss increases.

How hearing loss occurs
The consequences of undiagnosed and unmanaged hearing loss are significant across the age spectrum. Research links untreated hearing loss to depression, isolation, and withdrawal. Damage to families and relationships can also be caused due to stress, anger, and fatigue from miscommunications. For youth, hearing loss can impact education, learning, and social development.

Hearing loss is largely attributed to two categories: age and noise. Noise-Induced Hearing Loss (NIHL) can occur after a single exposure to a very loud sound. It can also be the result of long-term overexposure to moderate or loud sounds. NIHL is cumulative, permanent, and irreversible, but it’s also preventable.

What you can do
Whether your hearing loss is due to aging, noise, or something else, there is help. Once evaluated, hearing loss can often be managed with appropriate hearing aids, safety devices, education, and aural rehabilitation. Ninety percent of people with hearing loss can improve communi-

cation with properly fitted hearing aids and rehabilitative counseling.

Although hearing aids are an imperfect solution to a complicated problem, significant leaps in technology have occurred over the past few years. Hearing aids are smaller and sound more natural than ever. They use directional microphones to adapt to your environment and reduce background noise. They also have mini internal computers that learn your listening preferences and interface with various Bluetooth accessories.

If you have difficulty understanding speech or following a conversation in background noise, if sounds seem muffled, or you are suffering from tinnitus, you are probably experiencing hearing loss. Make an appointment with an audiologist to get your hearing checked, get advice on how to manage your hearing loss and how to prevent more from occurring. Whether you need a hearing aid, assistive listening device, tinnitus therapy, or strategies for communication, an audiologist can help you get reconnected to the world around you.

Like any health condition, the key is early intervention. The sooner hearing loss is addressed, the better the outcome. As you read this campaign, you will learn all about your hearing and ways to get hearing help.

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The stigma of age-related hearing loss

Everybody knows that aging is a natural progression in life that is accompanied by increasing physical limitations.

These physical limitations manifest themselves differently from person to person, causing people to ignore the effects of aging, embrace them, or give control to a family member.

One of these common physical limitations is diminished hearing, which typically progresses so slowly that it may not be fully recognized as an issue until later in life. While hearing loss is often identified as something that mostly older people have to deal with, the reality is that hearing loss is present earlier in life, but typically ignored until much later.

Many people seem to attach a negative stigma to hearing loss and think that wearing hearing aids shows that they are admitting defeat or giving in to aging; actually, the opposite is true.

Confronting hearing loss
The sooner a person can identify and admit that they have hearing loss, the easier it will be to deal with it later in life. Since people generally want to hide their hearing loss, hearing aids have become smaller and more invisible. The smaller the hearing aid, the smaller its batteries and components.

Waiting to confront hearing loss until much later in life could also mean that you are facing worsening eyesight and dexterity. This makes it very challenging to learn how to use and take care of a small device, such as a hearing aid.

People also need to be honest about the situations that are causing frustration and unmet needs in their lives due to hearing difficulty. We all have trouble in noisy restaurants, but if a person is no longer going to restaurants or avoiding group gatherings and find that they really miss that part of their life, something needs to be done.

There is plenty of research showing how important a healthy social life is for all ages, but especially for seniors. When somebody retires, they lose a large part of their life that used to create many opportunities for social interactions. To prevent isolation and promote good mental health, seniors need to make an effort to stay socially active.

Just like exercising any other muscle in our body, our brain needs to be kept active through social interaction. Being able to communicate in social situations requires understanding the conversation.

Who can help?
The good news is that no one has to be alone in dealing with their hearing loss. Seeking the help of a qualified and licensed professional, such as an audiologist, is the best place to start.

An audiologist will be able to objectively identify your degree of hearing loss and will counsel you through the best options available to

manage your hearing loss based on your lifestyle and needs. An audiologist will also help you learn how to use amplification, along with communication strategies to maximize improvement in challenging listening situations.

Hearing loss can affect people of all ages, but more importantly, it can be helped much more successfully compared than even 10 years ago. Ignoring hearing loss because it is viewed as a sign of aging should be a thing of the past. Like every other area of technology, digital hearing aids have far surpassed the big, bulky, squealing lumps that used to sit in or behind peoples’ ears. Like linear hearing aids, any stigma associated with hearing loss needs to become a thing of the past so people can continue living the life they love.

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EDITOR’S PICKS



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Blue-violet light and the early onset of AMD

“New indoor lighting, computer screens, tablets, cell phones, LEDs — they all emit a great deal of blue-violet light wavelengths that can reach deep into the eye and do damage over a period of time.”

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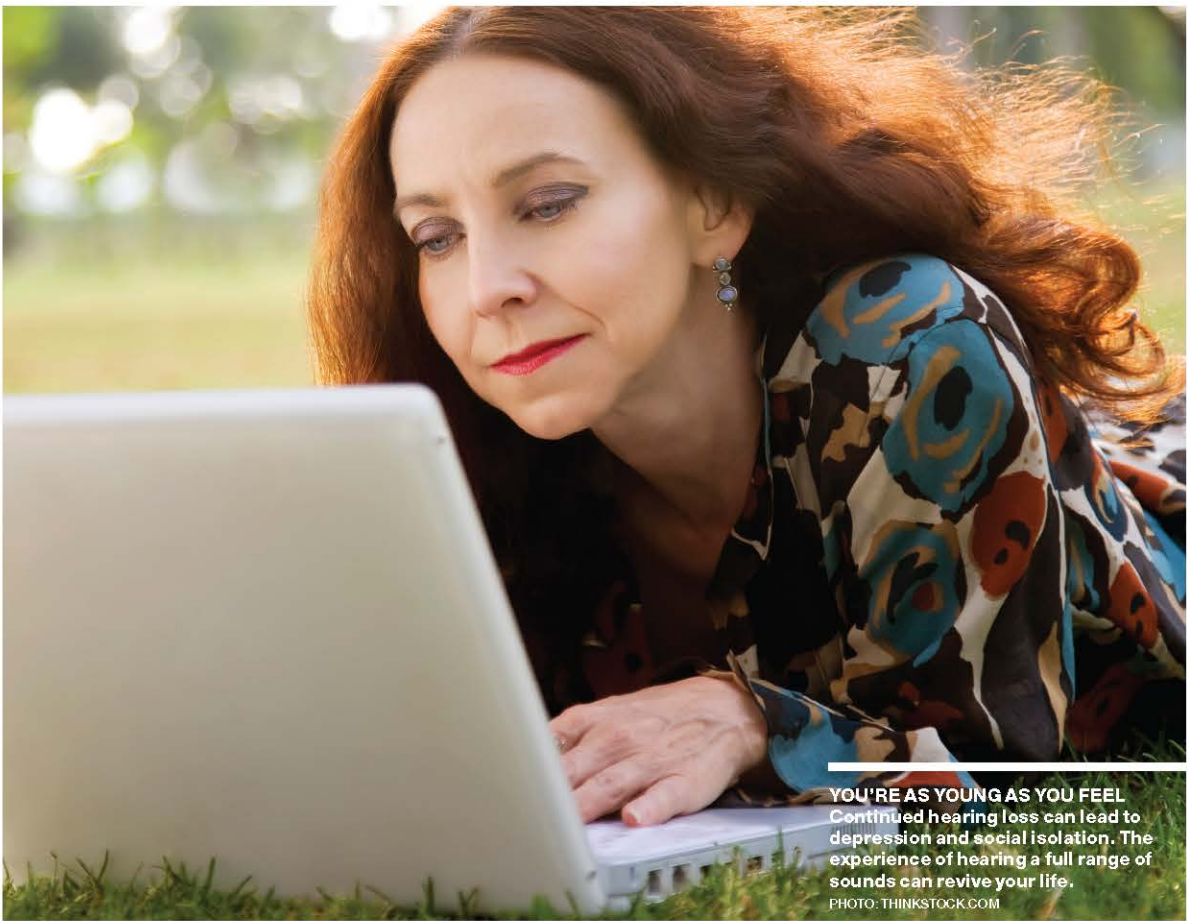
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YOU’RE NEVER TOO YOUNG FOR A HEARING AID

As an audiologist I have been asked, “am I too young for hearing aids?” many times, and my unequivocal answer has always been, “no, hearing loss does not discriminate based on age.”

In fact, the younger you are and the earlier the intervention, the longer the hearing aids can improve and maintain your quality of life.

The onset and severity of hearing loss is affected by noise exposure, medication side effects, and other health conditions. The risk of hearing loss increases with age because these effects add up over time. Many people are told that, hearing loss is a normal part of aging; however, high blood pressure was once also considered a normal part of aging, and did not require treatment. There is clear evidence of the benefits of treating high blood pressure as well as hearing loss as early as possible.

Why you should get your hearing tested

There are documented cases of patients with undiagnosed hearing loss who were mistaken for having dementia. Consider these symptoms: answering questions inappropriately, misunderstanding a meet-

a hearing test should definitely be part of the equation when dementia is suspected.

Another reason to treat hearing loss early is the old saying, “use it or lose it.” Some people with hearing loss in both ears choose to only wear one hearing aid.

“Family members should encourage and support their loved ones to get hearing problems diagnosed and treated as soon as possible.”

ing’s time and place, withdrawing from social situations, memory loss, and problems with abstract thinking (hearing loss forces the brain to work harder to understand speech, leaving less resources for forming memories and thinking). Therefore,

Over time, the decreased sound stimulation from the untreated ear, can make the brain lose its ability to process sound clearly from that ear. So even if a hearing aid were added to the untreated ear several years later, speech may still

not sound as clear in that ear than if earlier intervention had been present to maintain its function.

Signs you may be at risk

Most people think that only very loud sounds, such as gunshots, can cause hearing loss. In reality, even exposure to everyday sounds — such as hair dryers, vacuum cleaners, and lawnmowers — over long periods of time, in a cumulative fashion, can cause hearing loss. Healthcare workers in operating rooms and dental offices are at risk as the noise from drills and other equipment can cause permanent damage.

Prevention is key. Use earplugs where possible, and if needed, there are hearing protection devices that can protect hearing without affecting the ability to communicate. Importantly, people with hearing loss may actually be at greater risk of further damage to their remaining hearing, as sounds loud enough to cause hearing harm may not seem loud to them.

Listen to those you trust

If our vision becomes blurry, we notice immediately because the objects we can’t see clearly are tangible. Speech, however, is invisible, so those with hearing loss may not realize they have missed conversations. It’s often their family members who first notice a problem.

To benefit from early intervention and avoid the physical, psychological, social, and emotional impacts of hearing loss, family members should encourage and support their loved ones to get hearing problems diagnosed and treated as soon as possible — and we need to remember that they truly have our best interests at heart.

I believe the key to aging gracefully and enjoying life fully is to be proactive in taking care of our bodies — be it exercising more, eating better, controlling blood pressure, or treating hearing loss. See your audiologist and stay active!

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What’s all that noise in my head?

Most people would be surprised to learn that there is an internal alarm system located within their brain that is constantly monitoring the world around them.

Basically, our central nervous system is idling in a state of readiness to respond to any type of “red alert” it may encounter. This idling causes “brain noise” that runs in the background. The majority of us are completely unaware of this brain noise until something triggers it to cross a threshold to become audible. To some, the form is called tinnitus.

cent reporting severely intrusive tinnitus that affects their day-to-day activities.

It’s important to understand that tinnitus itself is not a disease, but a symptom. It’s your body’s internal alarm system going off and telling you that something is not quite right.

with hearing loss, the amount of environmental sound they are exposed to is reduced. This causes their ears to strain to hear what’s around them. All of this straining increases their sensitivity to their internal brain noise which manifests as tinnitus.

“It’s important to understand that tinnitus itself is not a disease, but a symptom. It’s your body’s internal alarm system going off and telling you that something is not quite right.”

Understanding tinnitus

Tinnitus is an auditory perception of a sound in the ear that can only be heard by the person experiencing it. Each person who has tinnitus describes it in their own way. Many report that it sounds like a ringing, buzzing, humming, clicking, whistling, or roaring. It can be loud or soft, constant or intermittent, can change in pitch, and be heard in one or both ears. About 15 percent of the population experiences tinnitus, with 5 per-

Tinnitus can be caused by a number of health conditions including high blood pressure, head trauma, dental problems, certain types of tumors, hearing loss, and much more.

Being proactive

Your ears are always working, but they relax when they find a soothing sound to listen to. They are geared to naturally want to listen to sound and are always scanning the environment for it. For people

If you do have tinnitus, you should avoid silence as it only intensifies your sensitivity to your internal brain noise. For this reason, hearing aids are often recommended as a front line defense against tinnitus because hearing aids expose people with hearing loss to sound. For those who experience tinnitus but don’t have hearing loss, custom ear sound generators may be recommended. In a nutshell, external sound decreases your sensitivity to internal sound.

QUESTION & ANSWER



Jillian Price
M.SC, AUD (C),
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LISTENUP!
CANADA

Too afraid to ask? What you need to know about your hearing now

Q: How do you know if you are experiencing signs of hearing loss?

A: For most, hearing loss occurs very gradually over time. As a result, it can go unnoticed for several years. More often it is a spouse or family member who will notice the hearing loss first. This is why I would suggest that if you have loved ones that are concerned about your hearing, go have it checked by a qualified hearing professional. Other signs of hearing loss include asking others to repeat what they say, difficulty hearing in background noise, turning up the volume on the TV or radio, and hearing speech that sounds muffled.

Q: What are the potential risks that may affect someone’s ability to hear in the future?

A: The number one potential risk is permanent hearing loss due to excessive noise exposure. You are at risk anytime you expose yourself to loud noise for extended periods of time. If the sound is loud enough, it can take as little as a few minutes to potentially damage your hearing. However, this is completely preventable if you protect your ears. This is why we always recommend the use of hearing protection anytime you are around potentially harmful levels of sound.

Q: What are some treatment options available for those that suffer from hearing loss?

A: The type of treatment available depends on what type of hearing loss you have; conductive or sensorineural loss. Conductive hearing loss can sometimes be corrected or improved through medical procedures depending on the source of the problem. This is usually not the case for sensorineural hearing loss. For both types of hearing loss, hearing aids are one treatment option with known benefits that include improved social, emotional, psychological and physical well-being.

Q: Is there a way to reduce the deterioration of hearing?

A: Like I mentioned earlier, the best thing you can do for your ears is to protect them from noise pollution at all times. Our ears are bombarded with environmental sounds during waking hours, 7 days a week, 365 days a year; overstimulation eventually wreaks havoc on the tiny hair cells in our inner ear and results in permanent hearing loss. Aside from hearing protection, I strongly encourage you to have a baseline hearing test performed by a qualified hearing professional. If some hearing loss is detected, annual hearing evaluations are recommended.

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Joey McIntyre

Makes sense of hearing loss

As a parent, your biggest desire is that your child remains healthy and happy. When New Kids On The Block's Joey McIntyre found that his son Rhys was born with hearing loss, he made it his mission to raise more understanding about the issue.

The ability to hear helps us to make sense of the world in a coherent fashion and enables us to not only communicate effectively, but also to do other things, like appreciate music.

New Kids On The Block singer Joey McIntyre, whose son Rhys was born with severe hearing loss, is deeply passionate about furthering understanding of the issue. “There are a lot of families that have children with hearing loss and thanks to the internet, there is access to lots of information. Just hearing different opinions and knowing that there’s hope and support in the community is huge.”

Those born with serious hearing impairments face major challenges. An inability to hear can be a devastating disability for some — especially those who don’t receive early intervention. The ability to utilize language is directly linked to the ability to hear; without hearing, communication becomes extremely difficult. Unless the problem is tackled early, some children may never develop the ability to speak. Hearing loss can negatively affect a child in many ways, such as impeding communication and socialization with other children.

Looking forward

However, the outlook for those with hearing loss is constantly improving; today there are numerous treatment options and support available to mitigate the effects of hearing loss.



SUPPORT THROUGH HARDSHIP
Joey McIntyre has found a variety of support systems while helping his son, Rhys (second from left) through severe hearing loss. Most important for him is keeping his child's best interests in mind.
PHOTO: HEAR THE WORLD FOUNDATION

That support comes in a variety of forms — from the friendship and solidarity found on internet forums to the specialized treatment offered by health care professionals such as speech therapists.

Taking such a holistic approach is something that Joey feels has greatly benefitted his son. “We’ve had an amazing audio verbal therapist that we really trust and he goes to every week. He’s talking like any three-and-a-half-year-old kid.”

Treatments and specialists

The treatment offered by therapists and specialists is key, but Joey is also

“It is important to have patience and ironically, you’ve got to listen... It’s just that you’re there for them and you love them and have as much patience with the situation as possible.”

keenly aware of the need for learning through discovery.

“When you’re trying to figure out what’s best for your kid, it’s easy to feel intimidated. It’s easy to just listen to doctors. [However] being able to take the time and figure everything out on your own is what’s important. Certainly, our therapist has a point of view and opinion but she works with tons of kids that have cochlear implants and some that have hearing aids. So it’s not that she’s pushing one way or the other, but it’s based on what she’s hearing and the child’s needs.”

And, in Joey’s opinion — the most important need that a hearing impaired child has — is a parent’s patience.

“It is important to have patience and ironically, you’ve got to listen. You have to listen to everything. The reality is it doesn’t matter what your child is hearing necessarily. It’s just that you’re there for them and you love them and have as much patience with the situation as possible.”

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Baby boomers: How North America’s largest population deals with their hearing



TRACY SAUNDERS
BSC, M.CL. SC. AUDIOLOGIST, REG. CASLPO

You are currently the largest population in North America, 85 million strong. You are the generation that is still working hard to fulfill your goals and dreams. You

have experience, education, along with both buying and political power.

The effects of hearing issues

Without even realizing it, you may be putting all that at risk. That edge, that level of sophistication and strength you have spent so many years developing could be compromised. You know your weight, blood pressure, and cholesterol levels. You have your eyes tested regularly. You may have apps on your iPad and smartphone that let you know your calories in versus your calories out. But, there is one aspect of your health which you’ve been neglecting and the consequences can be profound.

It’s easier than you think

So, “what am I missing?” you ask. Your hearing! Hearing difficulties are not just your parents’ deficit, and they may be putting you at a major disadvantage right now. If you have

not yet retired, its repercussions can be felt all the way from the boardroom to your living room.

A perfectly healthy life can deteriorate significantly if you have untreated hearing loss. This will undoubtedly gnaw at your self-confidence and make you appear much older than you actually are.

Research shows untreated hearing loss can cause depression, isolation, and has even been linked to dementia. Furthermore, as this loss deteriorates your brain becomes accustomed to its new decreased level of function and the change can be permanent. This, like many health challenges today, can be easily managed. The first step is in the knowing. An annual hearing test is a preventative, smart and savvy way to care for yourself and your loved ones.

Think of those around you

You have no issue wearing eye glass-

es to correct your vision loss. So what’s the big deal with hearing aids? As we get older, our hair changes color, our eyes weaken, and our hearing lessens. This is a fact and a normal process of life.

You can ignore the hearing loss, risk your relationships, risk your performance at work and continue to struggle in conversations, or, you can do something about it! Modern day hearing aids are comfortable, practically invisible, sound clear and are affordable. Don’t let such a tiny little device keep you from being the successful and outgoing person that you are. It is simply not worth the risk.

Make no mistake here, your loved ones suffer immensely too. They end up in the centre of your deterioration, becoming increasingly annoyed with the loud assault of the television volume and the incessant need to repeat themselves.

Often times, they are the first people to suspect a hearing loss. They notice that you aren’t hearing as well as you used to, laughing at the wrong jokes or struggling to stay tuned into conversations. They feel terrible watching you miss out and don’t understand why you won’t just have your hearing tested.

Baby boomers have been one of the highest goal oriented, research-driven, and knowledge-seeking groups in history. Allowing hearing loss to grab hold of you is akin to taking your place in a rocking chair on the front porch. It’s a risk you can simply avoid. Keep what you have earned, stay as healthy as you can and include an annual hearing test to your health regime.

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SOME SIGNS YOU CAN'T DETECT
Sharlene discovered she had glaucoma after receiving an eye exam with her sons.
PHOTO: DOCTORS OF OPTOMETRY CANADA



“I enjoy everything more now. I find myself taking little pictures in my brain of special moments... I now look at things a little bit longer than I would have ever done before.”

Sharlene Hayek, interior designer and busy mom of two, was a pro at balancing work and family life. Her balancing act came to an abrupt halt when she was diagnosed with glaucoma during an impromptu eye exam.

“Both of my sons are heavily involved in sports, it’s a big part of our lives outside of school,” explains Hayek. “None of us had had an eye exam before, and it wasn’t until my eldest son complained of vision problems affecting his performance that I booked us all appointments with a Doctor of Optometry.”

At the doctor’s office, Hayek went first to ease the nerves of her two boys. She was not worried as she’d always believed that she could see clearly. During the exam, her Doctor of Optometry detected glaucoma, an eye disease that has no obvious symptoms and can lead to blindness if left un-

treated. She had no visual symptoms and no family history of the disease. Hayek was left in disbelief as she discussed the possibility of “blindness” with her Doctor of Optometry.

Losing your sight

“I was very panicked, I started thinking about what life would be like without my vision, something I’d never considered before,” she recalls.

“The reality is most permanent vision loss is preventable,” says Doctor of Optometry Kevin Woodard. “It’s extremely hard to tell someone that they have permanent loss. This is magnified when you know routine scheduled eye examinations would have diagnosed, treated, and preserved vision.”

According to Woodard, most vision loss is caused by five treatable eye conditions: Age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD), Cataract, Diabetic Retinopathy, Glaucoma, and

FIVE SIMPLE THINGS YOU CAN DO TO IMPROVE YOUR EYE HEALTH:

- Book an eye exam with a Doctor of Optometry
- Eat a healthy diet
- Protect your eyes from the sun’s UV rays
- Wear eye protection during work and play
- Keep your life smoke-free

Refractive Error. Early detection of these eye diseases can significantly lower risks of vision loss.

Prevention is the key

“As much as 80 percent of vision loss can be prevented or treated if caught early,” says Woodard. “The best way

to reduce the risk of vision loss is to have regular, complete eye exams from a Doctor of Optometry.”

This message is something Sharlene Hayek wants everyone to understand. After her diagnoses, Hayek had laser eye surgery, which has slowed the progression of the disease significantly. But the glaucoma has left a lasting legacy for her. Not only does she actively encourage her friends to go for regular eye exams, Hayek no longer takes her vision and eye health for granted.

“I enjoy everything more now,” she says. “I find myself taking little pictures in my brain of special moments — a smile on one of my boy’s faces or a beautiful sunset. I now look at things a little bit longer than I would have ever done before.”

DOCTORS OF OPTOMETRY CANADA
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New discoveries reveal that our eyes have cells with the potential to restore sight

Stem cell science has always been a Canadian strength. The first stem cells were discovered at the University of Toronto in the 1960s, but for decades, nobody expected to find them in the adult eye.

This is because conventional wisdom said that the cells of the retina had stopped growing, and stem cells were absent.

Ten years ago, Dr. Derek van der Kooy and his team changed all of that with the discovery of stem cells — first in the eyes of adult mice, and then in the eyes of adult humans. Since then, the team has been an international leader in the effort to use these cells to develop therapies for those blinded by retinal diseases. Dr. van der Kooy’s team has shown that although the stem cells found in the retina are dormant, they can be nurtured in a laboratory to create viable cells for transplant. Dr. van der Kooy proved this principal in 2010 by implanting human retina cells derived from stem cells into the eyes of mice. The transplants partially restored vision.

Today, the van der Kooy team is one of multiple Canadian teams working to improve transplant techniques in order to make them efficient enough for human treatment. This requires enhanced techniques to purify the cells, and to hold the cells in place within the retina until they can grow and make connections.

Five years ago, about 10 percent of the cells in a culture grown from stem cells would be suitable for transplant. Now, cultures produced by Dr. van der Kooy’s team are more than 90 percent suitable. New techniques are being developed to help them grow where they are most needed to restore sight.

Reversing macular degeneration

There are many doctors working to develop stem cell therapies to make them safe and efficient enough for human use. One in particular is Dr. Gilbert Bernier, who is using stem cells to reverse the blinding effects of advanced AMD. In AMD, several cell types in the centre of the retina are damaged.

Dr. Bernier’s team is creating sheets of cells containing these cell types that may one day be trans-

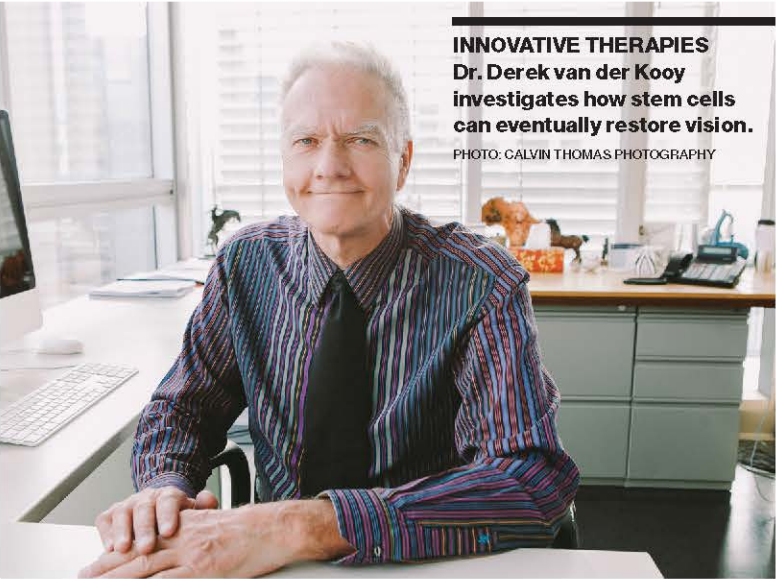
planted into the macula of a person with advanced AMD — restoring central vision.

International collaboration

Vision research is a global effort, with hundreds of teams working toward treatments and cures for retinal disease. Canada’s research community has made well-established links with scientists in the United States, Germany, United Kingdom, the Netherlands, France and Japan, as well as many more.

In the past five years, nearly 60 percent of papers published by funded scientists involved international teamwork. With this deepening cooperation and knowledge-sharing, the pace of sight-saving research continues to accelerate!

LORI LYONS
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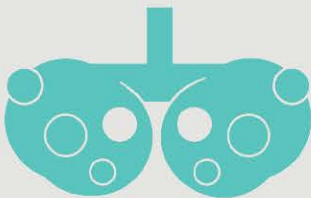
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How to keep your eyes healthy

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■ **Get an eye exam:** Adults age 19–64 should have an eye exam at least every two years (or every year if you have diabetes or a condition that your doctor says needs more frequent eye examinations).



■ **Give your eyes a break from your screen:** Computer Vision Syndrome can cause blurred vision and headaches. Every 20 minutes, take a break and focus your eyes on something at least 20 feet away.



■ **Quit smoking:** People who smoke are 3–4 times as likely to develop age-related macular degeneration (AMD), a leading cause of vision loss in Canada.



■ **Work out and eat well:** Excess weight, a sedentary lifestyle, and high blood pressure are all risk factors for some of the most common eye diseases.



■ **Wear sunglasses year-round:** Exposure to harmful UV rays is associated with a higher risk of developing AMD, cataracts, eyelid skin cancer, and tissue growths on the surface of the eye.



■ **Protect your eyes from injuries at home:** Eye hazards are everywhere — take precautions like pointing chemical spray nozzles away from the body, using grease shields on frying pans, picking up rocks and sticks before mowing the lawn, and wearing protective glasses while working in the garden.

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SEE THE DIFFERENCE THAT BEING PROACTIVE CAN MAKE



Dr. Keith Gordon
VICE PRESIDENT OF RESEARCH,
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As parents, we do everything we can to set our families up for success. We help with homework, prepare healthy lunches, and go for regular checkups with various health professionals. But what if there was something standing in the way — something you couldn't even see?

Vision and children

Problems with vision are common in children and can often go undetected by parents. You could be missing problems that will affect their ability to read, write, and learn. In fact, 80 percent of learning during a child's first 12 years is obtained through vision. A survey by the Canadian Association of Optometrists (CAO) showed that more than 60 percent of Canadian parents said they would know if their child was having issues with vision. It's important to remember that there's a difference between having good vision and having good vision health.

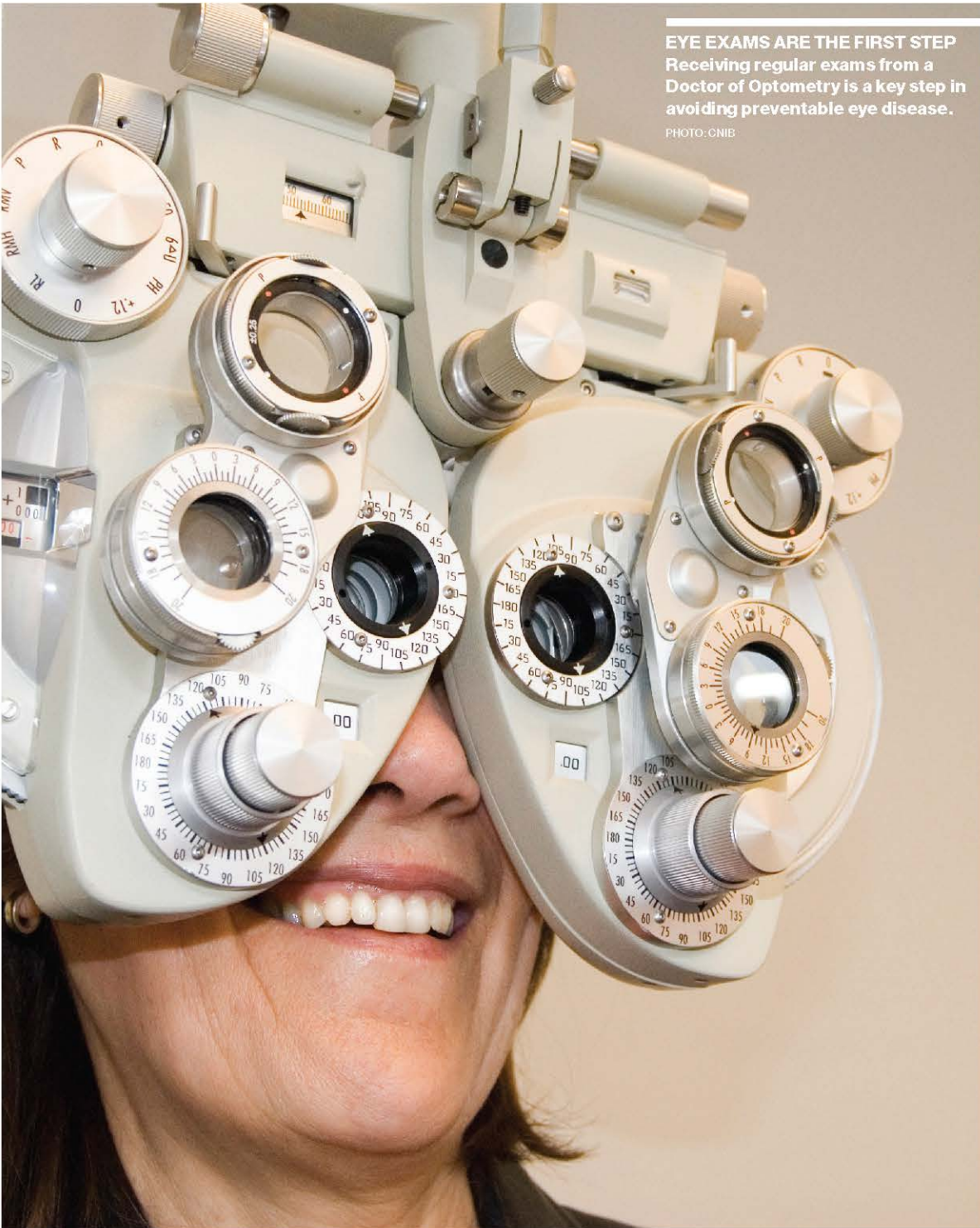
“It's important to remember that there's a difference between having good vision and having good vision health.”

Many eye diseases have no symptoms, and are impossible to detect without an eye exam. Unfortunately the CAO also reported that just 14 percent of children under the age of six have had a complete eye exam from a Doctor of Optometry. May is Vision Health Month, and the CNIB is calling on Canadians to take key steps to protect their vision health, starting with an eye exam.

The best time for a checkup

The CAO recommends that infants and toddlers should undergo their first examination between the ages of six and nine months. Children should then undergo at least one eye exam between the ages of two and five years old, followed by annual exams for school-age children. Adults should visit their Doctor of Optometry at least every two years, and seniors over 65 should book annual appointments.

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An invisible danger: Are your eyes properly protected?

Due to the world's aging population, cases of cataracts and AMD are likely to double in the next 30 years. But what causes these nasty eye conditions, and how can you prevent them from happening to you? **Cumulative damage** Non-visible UV rays emitted by the sun are one of the biggest causes of cataracts. Cataracts are characterized by a gradual clouding of the eye's lens and can lead to seriously impaired vision. At the current time, surgery is the only way to treat the condition.



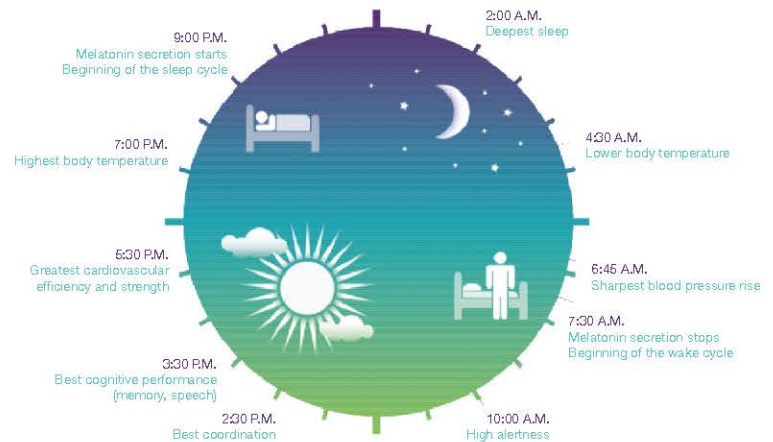
DR. JERRY NOLFI
OPTOMETRIST AND CO-FOUNDER,
THE TORONTO EYE CARE
OPTOMETRIC CLINIC

The most effective way of protecting yourself against non-visible UV and the possibility of cataracts is by wearing sunglasses whenever you're out in the sun. "I tell every one of my patients to wear sunglasses that offer 100 percent UVA and UVB protection. It's very important to invest in something to protect yourself," says Dr. Jerry Nolfi, an optometrist and co-founder of the Toronto Eye Care Optometric Clinic. Children are most at risk of having their lens penetrated by UV due to the transparent nature of young eyes, explains Dr. Upen Kawale, an optometrist and fellow co-founder

“Blue-violet light is the most energetic source of light that's able to reach the eye's retinal cells, and it's a major risk factor contributing to the early onset of AMD.”

of the Toronto Eye Care Optometric Clinic. "UV damage is cumulative over your lifetime, so make sure you get your kids to wear glasses with protection too," he says. **Hidden danger** Recent studies conducted by the Paris Vision Institute have discovered a type of light that's potentially as harmful to our eyes as UV rays. Known as blue-violet light, this type of High Energy Visible (HEV) light gives off no visual signs as to its presence, making it even more hazardous. Blue-violet light is the most energetic source of light that's able to reach the eye's retinal cells, and it's a major risk factor contributing to the early onset of AMD, a condition that leads to the gradual loss of central vision and is the leading cause of blindness in the developed world. There is currently no known cure for AMD. The Sun emits blue-violet light year-round, regardless of the weather, but its risks are also a lot closer to home, as Dr. Nolfi explains. "New indoor lighting, computer screens, tablets, cell phones, LEDs — they all emit a great deal of blue-violet light wavelengths that can reach deep into the eye and do damage over a period of time," he says. "But don't confuse blue-violet light for blue-

Blue-turquoise (not to be confused with blue-violet) light is essential to synchronizing the human biological clock



turquoise light, which humans actually need for our biological clock synchronization." **Essential protection** There's no chance that any of us are going to suddenly pack away our tablets or stop tweeting on our cell phones, so making sure that our eyes are properly protected is imperative. Luckily, there are products now available that help to completely block blue-violet light from reaching your retinas. "Most people understand that you need UV protected sunglasses when you're outside, but you need protection inside now, too," says Dr. Nolfi. "There are coatings that

can be implemented onto normal spectacles that selectively filter out blue-violet light, but allow blue-turquoise light to get through." When it comes to cataracts and AMD, prevention is key. Don't put the health of your eyes on hold, act today and help reduce your personal risk factors. "There's enough medical evidence to know that we need to be proactive," says Dr. Nolfi. "People don't quite understand the importance of blue-violet light but hopefully, with articles like this, we can make people more aware."

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