

Press release

Eye health is important!

The Darlington Health and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee has been promoting the importance of good eye health for all people, of all ages, in Darlington.

Eye Health is important because sight loss can increase the risk of:

- Depression
- Falls and hip fractures
- Loss of independence

Sight loss and visual impairment can affect people of any age and the likelihood of these conditions increases as people get older.

The population in Darlington is ageing and there is an increased risk of sight loss associated with obesity and chronic diseases e.g. diabetes

The good news is that half of the cases of serious sight loss are preventable according to the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB)

The following are Top Five Tips to improve eye health:

1. Have regular eye check-ups

Especially from the age of 40 years, even if you have no symptoms. If you have diabetes and are aged 12 years or over you should be offered regular screenings.

2. Know your family eye history

Some conditions are hereditary; e.g. a family history of glaucoma increases the chances of glaucoma by 4-9 times.

3. Protect your eyes

Wear sunglasses, avoid direct strong sunlight, and avoid eye injury during sport or DIY.

4. Eat healthily

Foods recommended for good eye health include green leafy vegetables, oily fish e.g. salmon and citrus fruits. These foods are rich in helpful vitamins and minerals.

5. Stop smoking

People who smoke are 2-4 times more at risk of developing macular degeneration than people who have never smoked. Smoking also increases the risk of chronic diseases that indirectly influence eye health.

Members of the Health and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee conducted a short survey of members of the public at the Tea Dance in Darlington. This was an opportunity to raise awareness of the importance of eye health and promote the Top Five Tips.

Chair of the Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Wendy Newall said, "We were encouraged that most of the respondents were aware of key risks and reported having an eye test, however we want to emphasise the importance of good eye health for all ages"

There are a number of charities that specialise in vision loss and can offer support –

- The Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB): – The RNIB's helpline is open Monday to Friday from 8:45am to 5:30pm. The number is 0303 123 9999, helpline email: helpline@rnib.org.uk; The RNIB's website is specially designed for people with sight loss and provides a wide range of useful information and resources. Website: <http://www.rnib.org.uk/recently Diagnosed/coming-terms-sight-loss>
- The Macular Society – helpline: 0300 3030 111
- International Glaucoma Association – helpline: 01233 64 8170
- RP Fighting Blindness – helpline: 0845 123 2354 or email: helpline@rpfightblindness.org.uk
- Diabetes UK – 0345 123 2399 or email: info@diabetes.org.uk
- Blind Veterans UK – 020 7723 5021