3 workplace strategies for protecting employees’ vision

It’s one of the best-remembered movie catchphrases of all time and closes the book on a bittersweet war-time romance: “Here’s looking at you, kid.” The film, of course, was “Casablanca,” and the line was Humphrey Bogart’s.

Lines and lyrics about vision are central to film and music, from The Who’s “I Can See for Miles” to Johnny Nash’s “I Can See Clearly Now” to Foreigner’s “Double Vision.” This may be because we use our eyes for almost everything we do, including reading, watching television, driving a car, and playing sports or video games. Vision is so integral to our daily lives that the thought of losing it is a major fear: Participants in one survey revealed that losing their eyesight would potentially have more impact on their daily lives than losing a limb, hearing, memory or speech.¹

Given that eye problems are such a major concern for Americans, it makes sense for employers to help them safeguard their vision both at home and at work. In fact, there are several guidelines employers should encourage among workers:

1. Wear protective eyewear. Employers are expected to provide safe work environments, and that may mean requiring protective eyewear. Failure to comply can sometimes result in disciplinary action, including suspension or termination. When workplaces require or suggest the wearing of safety goggles or glasses, employees should routinely slip on the eyewear and encourage co-workers to do the same.
2. **Look away from the computer.** Many employees spend long hours staring at computer screens. As a result, they sometimes suffer eye fatigue or dry eyes. These workers should follow the 20-20-20 rule to prevent eye strain: Every 20 minutes, they should lift their eyes from the screen and look 20 feet in front of them for 20 seconds.

3. **Eat healthy foods during breaks and at lunch.** It’s easy to grab a snack from a workplace vending machine or head out for fast food at lunch, but making the effort to eat healthy foods during working hours benefits vision. Most people know carrots are good for their eyes, but dark leafy greens such as collard greens, kale and spinach are beneficial, too. Fish that’s high in omega-3 fatty acids also promotes better eyesight: think salmon, tuna and halibut.

**The importance of regular eye exams**

In addition to taking steps at work and at home to protect their eyes from damage or injury, all employees should schedule regular eye exams. The American Optometric Association recommends that adults between the ages of 18 and 60 undergo an exam once every two years, and that those over age 60 undergo an annual exam. Those whose vision is at risk may need to have their eyes examined more frequently. "At risk" individuals are those:

» With diabetes, hypertension or a family history of ocular disease.

» Working in occupations that are visually high-demanding or hazardous to eyes.

» Taking prescription or non-prescription drugs with ocular side effects.

» Wearing contact lenses.

» Who’ve had eye surgery.

**Making eye care more affordable**

Eye exams can be expensive, and the cost of frames and lenses, contact lenses and treatment of eye disorders is daunting for some families. As an employer, consider making the protection and peace of mind offered by vision insurance available to your employees as part of your company’s voluntary insurance offerings.

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Sources
