Special Feature
Contact: Amy Blaser, Vice President
Phone: 402-562-3371
Email: aeblaser@columbushosp.org
Date: March 1, 2022

Caring for your eyes

(COLUMBUS, Neb.) – Vision is an important gift. Those of us who enjoy good eyesight — with or without the assistance of glasses or contacts — have a lot to be thankful for. We can be grateful we have access to the eye care we need right here in Platte County. It's a good idea to have your eyes checked periodically so you know they're in good condition. One survey found that only 13 percent of those responding said they have undergone an eye exam, even when they have had one or more eye problems. And that is an issue, because catching a condition early may help with treatment.

Some common eye problems include:

- Floaters, or small specks in your vision that may indicate a more serious problem.
- Dry eye, which can lead to itching and burning when your eyes don't produce enough tears.
- Age-related macular degeneration that can lead to blurred central vision.
- Cataracts, or cloudy spots on the eye's lens.
- Glaucoma, which develops when there is too much fluid pressure within the eye.

While some of these conditions may be noticeable, others are not, so it is important to see your eye doctor on a regular basis to make early detection possible.

If you do notice changes in your vision, it's important to make an appointment with your eye doctor. These changes may include:

- Blurry or double vision.
- Spots or flashes of light.
- Trouble viewing objects near or far.
- Inflamed or swollen eyelids.
- Burning or watery eyes.
- Difficulty adjusting to light or dark.

It is also important to be aware of risk factors — both hereditary and non-hereditary — that can contribute to eye problems.. They include:

- Diabetes.
- Family history of eye disease.
- High blood pressure.
- Obesity.

- Old age.
- Previous eye injury or surgery.
- Smoking.

For some of these conditions, you may need to see an ophthalmologist, who can help you determine how often you should check your eyes to promote good eye health.

Aside from regular checkups with your doctor, there are a number of things you can do to help promote eye health, including:

- **Eating a healthy diet.** And it's not just carrots! Leafy green vegetables — such as kale and spinach — contain lutein and zeaxanthin, which can lower your risk for macular degeneration and cataracts. Eating certain types of fish provides your body with omega-3 fatty acids that also lower your risk for macular degeneration.
- **Refraining from smoking.** Smoking puts you at increased risk of macular degeneration, cataracts and optic nerve damage.
- **Defending against the sun.** Wear sunglasses that protect against UV rays when outdoors.
- **Maintaining a healthy weight.** Being overweight increases your risk for developing vision problems.
- **Wearing protective eyewear.** If you are working in dangerous conditions, wear safety glasses to prevent injury to your eyes.
- **Taking a break from screens.** If you spend a lot of time on a computer, gaming system or smartphone, your eyes will need some rest. Use the 20-20-20 rule as a guideline: Every 20 minutes, look at something 20 feet away for 20 seconds to reduce eyestrain.

As part of its mission to promote healthy lifestyles, the Platte County Lifestyle Coalition (PCLC) is involved with several local health and wellness programs, including the Walk to Jerusalem, the Complete Health Improvement Program, running clubs at local schools, Walk with a Doc and more. To learn more about the PCLC or how you can become involved, contact Gene Vis, Platte County Lifestyle Coalition coordinator, at 402-562-4686 or edvis@columbushosp.org.

###