

# Vision and Preventative Medicine

By Marc Grossman, O.D., LAc.

The world is changing. The concepts of Western medicine have shifted in recent years and the public is demanding much more from our health care providers. The use of complementary forms of health care, like acupuncture and Chinese Medicine, is being more accepted by Western medicine.

As an optometrist I see vision problems multiplying at epidemic proportions in our society. Optometrists and ophthalmologists are very concerned with the deterioration they are seeing in their patient's vision. An example of this is illustrated by the condition of macular degeneration. Macular Degeneration is the leading cause of irreversible blindness in the United States and by the year 2020, an estimated 30 million Americans will be diagnosed with this condition. Although there is no effective treatment in Western medicine at the present time, research and clinical studies have shown that acupuncture, nutrition and microcurrent stimulation go a long way in preventing the disease from progressing to the point of vision loss. In some cases vision has improved.

In 2002 at the AAOM meeting in Washington, DC, Dr. Gene Bruno gave a workshop on the use of microcurrent stimulation and macular degeneration. He has been using it with great results in his practice. I was thrilled to see that this information was being shared with the acupuncture community as I feel that it is with the use of acupuncture and Chinese Medicine that many of the visual conditions we see today can be helped. What we need is an integrative approach to vision care in this country bringing together the best of both Western and Chinese medicine.

The conventional medical approach wrongly believes that eyesight almost always worsens with age and that nothing can be done about it - almost as if the eyes have a mind of their own, and that all we can do is stand idly by as they deteriorate. One reason for this is because eye care in this country is symptom oriented. In our training as eye doctors, we are taught that once something goes wrong with your eyes,

there is not much that can be done. And we are hardly taught anything about prevention of problems.

In general, people believe that eye problems are just a natural consequence of the aging process, but I have seen numerous patients who were able to stop their eyes from getting worse and also improve the condition of their eyes. This occurred in such cases as macular degeneration, cataracts, and glaucoma.

There is very little focus by eye doctors on prevention. For example, if a patient needs corrective lenses, an eye doctor will prescribe them. The patient will pay their eye care professional and express their gratitude for helping them to have better vision. Within a few years the prescription may not be adequate to provide the proper correction. The patient will undoubtedly return and their eye care specialist will probably tell the patient they have discovered that their vision has gotten worse and they will need a stronger prescription. The patient will again be grateful for the help. A similar scenario occurs with glaucoma. A patient will usually be given eye drops and be told to take these eye drops for the rest of their life. Where are the much needed prevention and rehabilitation?

I believe many eye diseases can be prevented. A question many patients ask me is, "Can anything be done to either prevent or improve these eye conditions instead of just letting them deteriorate?" The answer is yes! If, for example, a patient is 56 years old and is diagnosed with borderline, high intraocular pressures of 26 and 27 mm Hg, they will test the visual field and optic nerve. If the visual field and optic nerve are fine, the doctor will either just monitor it regularly or possibly give medication to control the pressure. There is nothing preventive to help stop the onset or to reverse the condition.

Instead, a program which includes dietary changes, nutritional supplementation, such as omega-3 essential fatty acids, alpha lipoic acid, and vitamin C, physical exercise, acupuncture and herbal medicine, has been shown by research to help lower eye pressure naturally without medication. This is the kind of proactive, preventative approach I am recommending.

Macular degeneration is even more frustrating. Most of the time the doctor just says, "There is nothing we can do and if it gets worse we can laser the vessels." Many of studies have shown the benefits of a nutritional program emphasizing the carotenoids, lutein and zeaxanthin, zinc, grape seed extract, bilberry and taurine along with the benefits of Chinese medicine and microcurrent stimulation.

One of the reasons this integrative approach is needed is because people are more than an interesting set of symptoms that must be addressed with the proper drug. They are complex human beings functioning on several levels: emotional, spiritual, and physical. All of these levels need to be considered when treating a person. Merely quelling the physical symptoms of disease does not address all of the levels of their being. Treating the eyes is no different. Treatments such as nutrition, Chinese medicine, physical exercise, and lifestyle, offer natural methods of balancing the multi-faceted cause of disease.

In summary, as vision problems continue to multiply in our society, using this integrative approach should allow patients to become active participants in their own care, giving them back the power and responsibility they have so trustingly handed over to their eye doctors. A goal of medicine should be the development of a practical approach to vision care based on an underlying philosophy that emphasizes prevention. In doing so, we celebrate the healing power within all of us and acknowledge the mind/body's inherent potential for self-healing.

---

Marc Grossman, O.D., LAc., holds degrees in optometry and acupuncture. He has been a behavioral optometrist for more than 20 years. He is Co-author of "Greater Vision: A Pathway to Physical, Emotional and Spiritual Transformation", *Natural Eye Care: A Comprehensive Manual for Practitioners of Oriental Medicine and Magic Eye: 3-D Guide*.

[www.visionworksusa.com](http://www.visionworksusa.com)