

Survey: Vision health a priority

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Most respondents across all ethnic and racial groups surveyed described loss of eyesight as the worst ailment that could happen to them when ranked against other conditions including loss of limb, memory, hearing, or speech, and indicated high support for ongoing research for vision and eye health, according to a study published online by *JAMA Ophthalmology*.

As the world's population and [average life expectancy](#) has increased, so has the prevalence of visual impairment and blindness. Understanding the importance of eye health to the U.S. population across ethnic and racial groups helps guide strategies to preserve [vision](#) in Americans and inform policy makers regarding priority of eye research to Americans.

Adrienne W. Scott, M.D., of the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, Baltimore, and colleagues analyzed the results of an online nationwide poll of 2,044 U.S. adults including non-Hispanic white individuals and minority groups to understand the importance and awareness of eye health in the U.S. population.

Of the survey respondents, the average age was 46 years, 48 percent were male, and 11 percent were uninsured. Sixty-three percent reported wearing glasses. Most individuals surveyed (88 percent) believed that good vision is vital to overall health while 47 percent rated losing vision as the worst possible health outcome. Respondents ranked losing vision as equal to or worse than losing hearing, memory, speech, or a limb. When asked about various possible consequences of vision loss, quality of life ranked as the top concern followed by loss of independence.

Nearly two-thirds of respondents were aware of cataracts (66 percent) or glaucoma (63 percent); only half were aware of macular degeneration; 37 percent were aware of diabetic retinopathy; and 25 percent were not aware of any eye conditions. Approximately 76 percent and 58 percent, respectively, identified sunlight and family heritage as risk factors for losing vision; only half were aware of smoking risks on vision loss. National support of research focusing on improving prevention and treatment of eye and vision disorders was considered a priority among 82 percent.

"These findings underscore the importance of good eyesight to most and that having good vision is key to one's overall sense of well-being, irrespective of ethnic or racial demographic," the authors write.

"The consistency of these findings among the varying ethnic/[racial groups](#) underscores the importance of educating the public on [eye health](#) and mobilizing public support for vision research."

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