

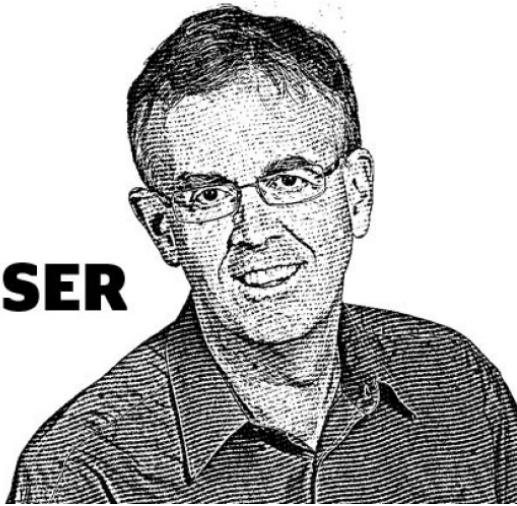
OLDER AND WISER: Columnist sees clearly after long last

Recent visit to the optometrist sets him straight

Tom Carney / Contributing writer

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Older
AND WISER
Tom Carney



Time to get my eyes checked.

Past time, actually. So last week I gave up my procrastinating ways, for the moment, and made an appointment to see an optometrist.

The good doctor was in a chatty mood. Did I know that one in seven seniors in Canada will eventually lose their eyesight?

I didn't. Or, that with early detection and treatment, blindness in the senior population is largely preventable.

I fessed up that it had been a while since my last exam and the doctor didn't look pleased.

"From now on I want you in here every year," he said. "No more of this getting your eyes checked every two or three years."

Suitably admonished I followed him into the examination room and the first thing I noticed was there was no eye chart on the wall. You know, the one with the big letter E on the top.

My optometrist, who I'm guessing is on the sunny side of 30, obviously knew what an eye chart was but I doubt if he had ever used one. It's all high tech now.

True story: When I was in public school I had a friend who thought glasses made him look funny. He memorized the eye chart and fooled everyone. He was on my baseball team and he couldn't see the ball coming at him if it hit him in the face, which it did, once, early in the season, breaking his nose and cracking his cheekbone in several places. When he got out of the hospital he had to wear goggles and a protective device for his nose for the rest of the year. He looked like a scuba diver and we nicknamed him Scooby-Doo and that name stuck with him long after the goggles came off.

"Vanity," as W.L. George rightly observed, "is as old as the mammoth."

As a part of a vision examination they put drops in your eyes to dilate your pupils. Then you get to pick out your new set of frames. Trouble is with your pupils the size of dinner plates you can't see a thing.

The first time I actually "saw" my new frames was when I went back for the fitting.

I googled the recommended frequency for eye tests for seniors. Up popped a page titled the eye exam from the Doctors of Optometry Canada. At age 65 and older adults should have an eye exam at least once a year. Adults aged 65 or older are at a higher risk for a number of eye conditions and diseases like cataracts, macular degeneration disease and glaucoma.

I ordered a pair of prescription sunglasses, which is not quite the extravagance it might seem. My optometrist explained that wearing a good pair of sunglasses can help slow down the progression of cataracts. Plus it's a pretty cool look. That's me talking not the optometrist.

Eye glasses can be expensive. MSP provides some coverage for optometric services for those under the age of 19 and those aged 65 and over.

For adults aged 19 to 64 eye exams are not covered by MSP unless medically required. In my case it pays to be a senior.

Optometric services not covered by MSP regardless of your age include eyeglasses, contact lenses, low vision aids, eye co-ordination exercises, eye medications, contact lens filling and laser refractive surgery management.

Private health insurance can help with some but not all of the cost of those expenses.

I picked up my new glasses last week. I can see clearly now.

There is a hearing aid centre right next door to my optometrist, not that there is anything wrong with my hearing. Then again I said that about my vision too.

I guess I know where I'm off to next.

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