

## Corner Clinic: Our Experts Answer Your Health Questions

*This month we talk about sunlight and macular degeneration, surviving the first days of parenthood and the pneumonia vaccine*

By UC San Diego Health Experts | April 29, 2016

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### **Do sunglasses help with macular degeneration?**

**Eric Nudleman, MD, PhD, ophthalmologist at Shiley Eye Institute**

Although direct causality between sunlight exposure and macular degeneration has not been established, epidemiological studies suggest that blue light exposure may be a risk factor for the disease. Experimental evidence has demonstrated that ultraviolet (UV) and blue light can damage the retinal pigment epithelium, which may accelerate the progression of macular degeneration. Extended UV exposure is also associated with damage to other structures of the eyes, including the ocular surface. This

can result in the formation of pterygium, a growth of tissue that can distort the clear surface of the eye and result in changes in vision.

Since UV and blue light are components of sunlight, sunglasses are recommended for everyone, including those with macular degeneration. Sunglasses that block 99 to 100 percent of UV-A and UV-B rays provide the best protection. In addition, exposure to blue light can be limited by lenses with red, orange, yellow or amber tint. A diet rich in antioxidants, including dark green leafy vegetables (spinach, kale, collard greens), and fish with high omega-3 fatty acid content (such as salmon) may also be beneficial in preventing the progression of macular degeneration.

### **How do you survive the early days of parenthood?**

**Chelsea Haakmeester, MA, therapist with the [Department of Reproductive Medicine](#)**



Sleepless nights, crying babies and a whole new schedule that involves feedings, spit up and dirty diapers: Being the parent of a newborn is exciting, but it can also be anxiety producing and stressful. No one gives new parents a manual specific to their baby, so it can be overwhelming to adjust to your new role as a parent while learning about your child's temperament, sleep routine and feeding patterns.

New parents should try to do only the essentials while recovering from childbirth and learning to manage sleep deprivation. Prioritizing sleep and taking breaks from the baby are paramount, and though difficult, they can be achieved by partners taking turns caring for their infant, enlisting family and friends for support or by hiring a postpartum doula, a certified provider who assists with newborn care, new mother support and education on anything from infant feeding to the emotional and physical recovery from birth.

Research shows that 1 in 7 mothers will struggle with a postpartum mood or anxiety disorder, and while researchers don't have a full understanding of what causes them, we do know that changes in hormones, having a history of anxiety or depression and big environmental stressors are several factors that put new moms at a higher risk. The good news is that with appropriate help, postpartum mood and anxiety disorders are preventable and treatable. One of the main things new moms can do is prioritize self-care.

New mothers need to put their "oxygen mask" on first before helping others with theirs. Activities such as taking walks, talking to a close friend about the joys and struggles of motherhood or taking a bath can give mothers an opportunity to regroup and feel more balanced mentally and physically. Similarly, new parents do best when they continue to prioritize their relationship and go on date nights or incorporate other efforts that allow them to spend quality time together away from their baby. Studies suggest that 67 percent of new parents report a decrease in relationship satisfaction after a baby is born. Committing to time away from the baby and having regularly scheduled "check-ins" can help preserve the relationship of new parents.

A new UC San Diego Health workshop – [Parenting: Surviving the First 6 Weeks](#) – was created to help parents during the postpartum period. Participants learn some important tips and tools, including:

- → Strategies for sleep in the "4th trimester"
- → Ways to care for yourself while caring for your infant
- → Tips for coping with the myriad of emotions after baby arrives
- → Development of a postpartum support plan

Ultimately, the best survival technique for new parents is to remember that each family has its own unique schedules and methods for raising a child. It is not one-size-fits-all, so comparing yourself to what other parents do will only cause frustration. In the end, focusing on what works best for your growing family is what's most important.



### **Who should get a pneumonia vaccine?**

**Jaswinder P. Bajwa, MD, assistant clinical professor and hospitalist**

Pneumonia is a serious and potentially lethal health concern for infants, older adults and those with medical conditions that suppress the immune system. In the United States, two types of pneumococcal vaccines are approved for use: a pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (Pneumovax 13) and a pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine (Pneumovax).

Pneumovax 13 is recommended for all children younger than five years of age and all adults 65 or older. The vaccine is also recommended for any individual six years of age or older with one or more of the following risk factors: cochlear implants, sickle cell disease, HIV, cancer, chronic kidney disease or immunosuppression from steroids or radiation therapy.

Pneumovax 23 is recommended for all adults 65 years or older, meaning that older adults should get both vaccines. People between the ages of two and 64 who have any of the above mentioned conditions and who also smoke, have chronic heart disease, chronic lung disease, diabetes mellitus, alcoholism or chronic liver disease should also get the second vaccine.

Revaccination five years after the first dose is recommended for Pneumovax 23 in some situations and should be discussed with your primary care physician.

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