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Comedian Rickey Smiley sees the need to remind folks to care for their eyes

December 18, 2014 By Kate Ferguson

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Americans don't take the health of their eyes very seriously. An estimated 61 million adults in the United States are at high risk of severe vision loss. What's more, only half of these folks visited an eye doctor in the past 12 months.

The statistics also show that African Americans are a higher risk of developing glaucoma after age 50, and 2.2 million people are living with this complex eye disease caused by damage to the optic nerve that leads to progressive and irreversible vision loss. The illness is the also one of the leading causes of blindness.

All of these statistics are familiar to Rickey Smiley. The comedian recently teamed with America's Best Contacts & Eyeglasses to increase awareness about eye health. Here, Smiley talks with Real Health about the campaign and his reason for working with the eyewear company.

Why did you join this eye health awareness campaign?

Well, it's not just about selling glasses. We definitely wanted to let people know about eye health because people don't go to get their eyes checked. A lot of people think that it's expensive, and they just don't pay attention to their eyes. Just like with the rest of your body, you've got to pay attention to your eyes because eye disease can sneak up on you. Eye exams are very important.

Why did you partner with America's Best in particular?

I've been a customer of America's Best for years because I've been wearing glasses since I can remember. Also, I work for Radio One and they're in business with America's Best. Since I wear glasses, the idea of a partnership seemed like a good fit and a great chance to display some of the awesome frames they have at America's Best. It was just a good partnership and business venture, and I'm excited about it.

How do you influence consumers to buy into the goals of the campaign?

I get a lot of compliments on my glasses, so I tell everyone where I get my eyewear. That's the

perfect opportunity to showcase the goals of the eye health campaign.

Why do you think many people neglect the health of their eyes?

People keep their hair done, keep their nails done, and they'll buy a brand new outfit. But people just don't think to get their eyes checked, until their vision becomes impaired or gets blurry. At America's Best, we let people know they should get their eyes checked just like they go to get a heart exam. We urge them to make eye checkups part of their regular health screening. There's also research that shows one of the barriers to people getting their eyes checked is the cost. Often, people aren't aware of more affordable options out there, so they don't get their eyes checked and buy some eyewear. But that's one of the good things about America's Best, especially with the Rickey Smiley eyewear deal: You get two pairs of eyeglasses for $104.95, which includes a free eye exam. That's a fantastic deal. The frames come in a lot of color combinations and resemble wood grain. People are loving them all over the country.

How important do you think style is for many consumers in terms of their eye health and buying glasses?

Well, remember, there was a time when wearing glasses wasn't the cool thing. But they can make glasses cool. This is one of the other things I'm excited about. My eyewear line has a lot of hot color combinations where the side of the frames is a different color from the front of the frames and the inside of the frames is a different color from the outside, and they are fun to wear. Most people that I know who have the frames are really excited about the eyewear, and they get compliments all the time. So we're just making wearing glasses cool, as opposed to having people tease you about it. Everybody can call 1-800-TWO-PAIR, or they can visit twopair.com and look at the frames.

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