

Healthy Habits

Tips for reaching and maintaining your optimum state of health

January 2006

January is National Glaucoma Awareness Month

There are more than 65 million suspected cases of glaucoma across the globe. More than 2 million Americans over the age of 40, and one in ten over the age of 80, have been diagnosed with the disease. Over one million Americans are currently living with glaucoma--and don't even know it. The American Academy of Ophthalmology warns that everyone over the age of 60 is at risk for the disease. Besides age, race can be another important factor in developing glaucoma. According to the National Eye Institute, African-Americans are five times more likely to develop glaucoma and four times more likely to go blind from it than Caucasians. Hispanics are more likely to develop glaucoma after age 60 than any other group.

What Is Glaucoma?

Chronic (Open Angle) Glaucoma is the most common type. In open angle glaucoma, pressure inside the eye builds up due to poor drainage. It usually results from aging of the drainage channel, which doesn't work as well over time but has been found in younger people, as well.

Normal Tension Glaucoma is a form of open angle glaucoma not related to high pressure. People with normal tension glaucoma may be unusually sensitive to normal levels of pressure. Reduced blood supply to the optic nerve may also play a role in normal tension glaucoma.

Acute (Angle Closure) Glaucoma occurs in less than 10 percent of Caucasians or African-Americans, but for those of Asian and Native American descent, the risks are as high as for open angle glaucoma. Hispanics are midway between these groups. It causes a sudden rise in pressure, requiring immediate, emergency medical care. The signs are usually serious and may include blurred vision, severe headaches, eye pain, nausea, vomiting or seeing rainbow-like halos around lights. Occasionally, the condition may be without symptoms; similar to open angle.

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Regular eye exams are your best bet to stop or stem the loss of vision due to glaucoma. Don't lose your eyes to the "sneak thief of sight".

Could you be letting your sight slip away?

Glaucoma has long been termed the "sneak thief of sight" because it slowly takes away vision, often without the patient even realizing it. People with glaucoma usually notice a loss of peripheral vision first. Over time, glaucoma may also damage central vision. Unfortunately, once symptoms are detected, the effectiveness of treatment diminishes. Once vision is lost to the disease, it cannot be restored.

"Almost everyone is at risk for developing glaucoma," said Daniel D. Garrett, senior vice president of Prevent Blindness America, the leading volunteer eye health and safety organization dedicated to fighting blindness and saving sight. "It is essential that we educate ourselves on the disease and do all we can to fight the effects now."

Utilizing resources such as "The Glaucoma Learning Center" located at www.preventblindness.org, and the Health Information Library at www.optimahealth.com can provide you with a wealth of knowledge about this disease, how to identify it and how to counter or prevent its onset. Still, the best weapons in the fight against glaucoma are **regular eye exams**.

Don't let glaucoma keep you in the dark.