

Glaucoma: Are you at risk?

January is Glaucoma Awareness Month

There are approximately 2.2 million Americans age 40 and older who have glaucoma, and half of those are at risk for going blind because they do not know they have the disease.

Glaucoma is a condition in which the optic nerve, responsible for transmitting visual information from the eye to the brain, is damaged. Although the nerve damage is usually associated with elevated pressure inside the eye, other factors can be involved. It may begin with the loss of peripheral vision and then advance to a reduction in central vision. Glaucoma can potentially lead to vision loss or blindness.

"Most people who have glaucoma don't

notice symptoms until they begin to lose some vision. But vision loss from glaucoma can be prevented if it's detected and treated in time," said area ophthalmologist Dr. Jonathan M. Frantz, medical director of Florida Eye Health. "As part of Glaucoma Awareness Month in January, we urge you to get a complete eye exam if you're at risk for developing glaucoma."

So, who's at risk? "African-Americans over age 40, Hispanics, people with a family history of glaucoma, individuals over age 60, people with other health conditions, such as diabetes and those who have experienced a serious eye injury are considered at risk," says Dr. Frantz. Anyone who falls into one

or more of these categories should talk with an eye doctor about how often an eye examination should be conducted to ensure good vision.

Although glaucoma cannot be cured, early detection and treatment can usually preserve vision. Know your risk factors and have your eyes examined at the intervals recommended by your eye doctor. For more information, visit www.bettervision.com. ■



Treatment revolutionized by tiny devices

A tiny device about the size of a grain of rice is revolutionizing glaucoma surgery and saving the vision of patients diagnosed with glaucoma. The Ex-PRESS mini shunt is being used in a limited number of ophthalmology practices in the area. Dr. Rick Palmon at Southwest Florida Eye Care is one of just two physicians in the area offering this technology.

Glaucoma is a potentially blinding eye condition in which optic nerve damage is caused by fluid buildup in the eye. This pressure damages the optic nerve which is the conduit connecting the eye to the brain. Untreated pressure on the optic nerve leads to visual deterioration and possibly blindness.

"The miniature-size Ex-PRESS shunt

diverts fluid through an extremely small tube to the outside of the eye. It keeps a pathway open so the fluid which would otherwise build up in the eye goes around the blockade," said Palmon. "The beauty of the Ex-PRESS shunt is that it provides precise control of the amount of fluid that is allowed to flow out, helping the eye maintain a healthy level of internal pressure."

Approximately 10 million Americans have elevated eye pressure, which places them at risk for the onset of glaucoma. Eighty thousand Americans are already blind from the disease. African-Americans have a three-fold greater risk of developing glaucoma.

Other treatment options for glaucoma include medication (eye drops) or laser surgery. These are usually the first treatments

recommended when a patient has been diagnosed with the disease. When these treatments don't work, or cease to be effective, a more invasive procedure, called trabeculectomy may be recommended. Trabeculectomy surgery creates a pathway for fluid to exit the eye and includes making incisions into the eye.

"Trabeculectomy is a proven treatment for glaucoma and has been used for the past 30 years," said Palmon. "The Ex-PRESS offers an alternative, less-invasive method because it doesn't include making any cuts into the eye and it is getting very positive results with my patients. The device is inserted through a small needle tract. In most cases my patients are able to eliminate their need for glaucoma eye drops after Ex-PRESS surgery." ■

Glaucoma

During January's Glaucoma Awareness Month, the American Academy of Ophthalmology and Eye Doctors around the country urge everyone who is at risk for glaucoma to see an eye doctor for a complete eye exam.

Glaucoma is a potentially blinding disease. It's the second most common cause of blindness in the United States and the most common among African-Americans.

The exact cause of primary open-angle glaucoma, the most common form, is uncertain. However, other forms of glaucoma may occur in conjunction with other abnormalities of the eye.

There is no "cure" for glaucoma, but vision loss can usually be prevented or slowed if treatment is started early.

The best way to protect yourself from vision loss caused by glaucoma is to know your risk factors and to have your eyes examined at recommended intervals.

Those at highest risk for glaucoma include:

- >> **Everyone over age 60**
- >> **African-Americans** over age 40
- >> **Hispanics**
- >> **People with** other health conditions, such as diabetes (exam every year)
- >> **Individuals** that have experienced a serious eye injury
- >> **People with** a family history of glaucoma

At first there may be no symptoms, but as the disease progresses a person with glaucoma may notice his or her vision gradually failing with:

- >> **Blurred** Blurred
- >> **Loss** of peripheral vision
- >> **Difficulty** focusing on objects
- >> **Presence** of halos around lights

Those at risk should have a complete eye exam at least every one to two years.

If you have glaucoma, it is important to follow your treatment plan.

Glaucoma is a lifelong condition. Patients and their eye doctors need to work together to agree on a treatment plan that offers the patient the best chance of preserving his vision.

Common treatments include oral or topical medication, as well as laser and conventional surgery. Talk to your eye doctor about your treatment options because some may be better for your condition than others.

Do not stop taking medication without talking to your eye doctor. You and your eye doctor are a team whose goal is to preserve your vision and help you maintain your quality of life.

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