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EARLY DETECTION AND TREATMENT PROTECTS YOUR VISION FROM GLAUCOMA

See your licensed eye doctor for yearly, comprehensive eye exams and preserve your vision.

MADISON, Wis. – Glaucoma impacts an estimated 3 million plus Americans (according to the Glaucoma Research Foundation), and yet, understanding and awareness of this detrimental disease remains low in the public eye. Because of a lack of early onset symptoms, many who are affected by glaucoma are unaware that they even have the disease. This is especially concerning given the consequences of uncontrolled and untreated glaucoma. According to the American Optometric Association (AOA), glaucoma is the second leading cause of blindness in the United States and, therefore requires a heightened level of public awareness.

Glaucoma – “The Sneak Thief of Sight”

Frequently, glaucoma attacks an individual’s eyesight without the presence of early warning signs. “Glaucoma is often referred to as the ‘sneak thief of sight,’” explains Dr. Andrew Nahas, 2024 Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA) President and Viroqua, WI optometrist. “By the time symptoms do appear, it may be too late to save those affected from suffering permanent vision loss.” Vision lost cannot be regained, which is why it is so important to protect your sight by receiving a comprehensive, dilated exam performed by a licensed eye doctor, during which glaucoma can be diagnosed early. Although glaucoma is not preventable and has no current cure, it can be controlled if diagnosed and treated early by a licensed eye doctor.

Glaucoma is a group of eye disorders that lead to progressive damage to the optic nerve. People with glaucoma can lose nerve tissue, resulting in vision loss. The most common form of the disease is primary open-angle glaucoma, which develops slowly and usually without symptoms. In primary open-angle glaucoma, the fluid pressure inside the eye increases. This increase in pressure may result in progressive damage to the optic nerve and loss of nerve fibers, causing possible vision loss. Untreated, glaucoma can cause significant vision loss and even blindness. The disease can accelerate quickly and can affect patients at different stages of life. “A common misperception is that glaucoma only affects older adults when, in reality, it can happen at any age. In fact, it’s most commonly detected in people in their 40s,” acknowledges Dr. Nahas.

Risk Factors and Treatment

As is the case with many diseases, factors such as age and race can increase an individual’s risk for developing glaucoma. According to the Glaucoma Research Foundation, glaucoma is six to eight times more common in African Americans than in Caucasians (<http://www.glaucoma.org/glaucoma/glaucoma-facts-and-stats.php>). In addition, at greater risk for glaucoma include those who have a family history of the disease, existing medical conditions, and adults over the age of 60.

Treatment for glaucoma includes prescription eye drops and medication to reduce pressure in the eyes. In certain cases, surgery may be effective in reducing pressure. Diagnosis is the first step in preserving your vision, and the only way to guarantee detection of this condition is through a comprehensive eye exam with your licensed eye doctor. The WOA recommends annual comprehensive eye exams for adults and children. Visit <http://www.woa-eyes.org/members> for a list of licensed eye doctors in your area. The early detection and treatment of glaucoma is crucial in saving vision.

About the Wisconsin Optometric Association

The Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA) is a nonprofit affiliation of licensed doctors of optometry and associated businesses dedicated to the preservation and enhancement of the vision welfare of the people of Wisconsin. The WOA accomplishes its goals through: education and dissemination of information, organized governmental activity, legislation and regulation, mediation with consumer and public interest groups, and provision of collective benefits to its members. Approximately 640 doctors of optometry are currently members of the WOA, located in nearly every county in the state. All members must be licensed to practice optometry by the State of Wisconsin. For more information, visit WOA’s website at www.woa-eyes.org.