Glaucoma: The sneak thief of sight

Posted by Robert D. Newcomb/Ohio State University January 07, 2009 00:00AM
Categories: Impact, Netwellness
Glaucoma is the leading cause of irreversible vision loss in the United States, affecting more than 3 million Americans. Half of those people may not even realize they have the disease.

People at high risk for glaucoma include:
- Everyone 60 and older
- African Americans 40 or older
- Those with a family history of glaucoma

January is Glaucoma Awareness Month and the Glaucoma Research Foundation has compiled the following statistics as a reminder of the severity of the disease:
- Glaucoma is the second leading cause of blindness in the world, according to the World Health Organization.
- Glaucoma is 6 to 8 times more common in African Americans than Caucasians, according to the American Academy of Ophthalmology.
- Estimates put the total number of suspected cases of glaucoma at around 65 million worldwide, according to Quigley, “Number of people with glaucoma worldwide,” 1996.
- Those with a family history of glaucoma
- African Americans 40 or older
- Everyone 60 and older

A dilated eye exam is the best way to test for glaucoma. During a dilated eye exam, the doctor puts drops into each eye to dilate the pupils. This allows a better view of the eye’s optic nerve, which can show early signs of glaucoma. If your doctor detects early signs of the disease, it can be controlled, and your remaining vision protected.

Glaucoma usually occurs when the normal fluid pressure inside the eye steadily increases. This can lead to optic nerve damage and reduced peripheral (side) vision. As the disease worsens, the field of vision gradually narrows, ultimately leading to blindness without treatment.
A free brochure, "Don't Lose Sight of Glaucoma," is available from your eye care professional or by writing to:

Glaucoma
2020 Vision Place
Bethesda, MD 20892-3655

You can also contact the American Optometric Association for its Vision FAX brochure called "Glaucoma can't be prevented, but it can be controlled." Call 1-800-365-2219 and ask for brochure #0069.

Tags: glaucoma, Glaucoma Research Foundation, Netwellness, Ohio State University, optometry, Robert Newcomb, vision loss