

Eye on Health

Guarding Against Glaucoma

(NAPSA)—A simple eye exam could help protect you from a leading cause of vision loss: glaucoma.

More than 4 million Americans have glaucoma, an eye disease that damages the optic nerve and destroys eyesight. However, nearly half of those with glaucoma are not aware they have it.

With its painless and gradual loss of vision, glaucoma comes with no early warning signs, but it can be detected during a comprehensive dilated eye exam. The National Eye Institute (NEI), one of the federal government's National Institutes of Health (NIH), encourages Americans to make vision a health priority and receive regular dilated eye exams.

Paul A. Sieving, M.D., Ph.D., director of the NEI, said, "Treatment during the early stages of glaucoma can control the disease and prevent future vision loss and blindness. This is why we encourage people at higher risk for glaucoma to get a comprehensive dilated eye exam every one to two years."

Those at higher risk for developing glaucoma include:

- African Americans over age 40
- Everyone over age 60, especially Mexican Americans
- People with a family history of the disease.

With a dilated eye exam, an eye care professional can see inside the eye to detect signs of glaucoma, such as subtle changes to the optic nerve and other vision problems, before any symptoms appear. This allows the eye care professional to monitor patients and treat glaucoma as early as possible.



A dilated eye exam can help protect against glaucoma.

"A dilated eye examination is essential to protecting the vision of those at higher risk for glaucoma," noted Anne L. Coleman, M.D., Ph.D., Frances and Ray Stark Professor of Ophthalmology at UCLA's Jules Stein Eye Institute and chair of the glaucoma subcommittee for NEI's National Eye Health Education Program. "If glaucoma is detected early, treatments such as medication, conventional surgery or laser surgery can slow or stop vision loss. High pressure inside the eye, which may be associated with glaucoma, does not by itself mean that you have glaucoma. Only a dilated eye exam and evaluation of the optic nerve can tell you that."

The NEI is encouraging individuals to get an eye exam and to spread the word about glaucoma to family and friends by using NEI's e-cards and brochures. For further information and links to help you find an eye care professional in the area, visit www.nei.nih.gov/glaucoma.