

Glaucoma: The thief of sight

There are several types of glaucoma, but all have one thing in common: damage to the optic nerve in the back of the eye. The eye pressure may not always be elevated, but peripheral vision examinations will detect it. It is the leading cause of blindness in the elderly and in African Americans.

Numerous risk factors are listed in *The Eye Care Revolution* (Kensington, 1999). I have found the two major factors are stress and poor circulation in the eye at night. High blood pressure medications actually can result in blood pressure falling too low at night. Poor circulation, age and smoking are some common contributors to the development of glaucoma.

Most people will have the open-angle variety of glaucoma (also called primary open-angle, or chronic simple glaucoma).

There really are six types of glaucoma, including chronic open-angle glaucoma. The other types are congenital, narrow-angle, secondary, low tension and glaucoma suspect. All six types share damage to the optic nerve through a mechanism of elevated pressure in the eye, poor blood supply in the optic nerve or both.

Eye drops, laser therapy (especially for the narrow-angle variety) and surgery are the conventional treatment options and are required if you continue to lose peripheral vision (tested by visual field exams).

But more and more eye doctors are agreeing that there are other treatment options that can aid in the management of this sight-threatening condition:

- Reduce alcohol and caffeine intake
- Exercise 30 to 40 minutes a day, even using light weights
- Stop smoking
- Breathe deeply. Take 10 slow, deep breaths, three times daily. You will notice your blood pressure and heart rate may change (for the better) and you will feel more relaxed. Breathing is the first step toward meditation, which is very effective in reducing stress.
- Avoid low blood pressure at night if you are taking high blood pressure medicine. Have your blood pressure taken while lying down. Perhaps you won't need an evening dose.
- Improve circulation with ginkgo biloba, magnesium 500 mg at bedtime, Trifolia or salvia. For more information, see *The Eye Care Revolution* (Kensington, 1999), or *The One Earth Herbal Sourcebook* (Kensington, 2000).

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