

You may have blinding glaucoma, but no symptoms

Half of the 2.7 million Americans with glaucoma do not even realize they have this leading cause of blindness, studies show. Glaucoma is irreversible, but can be slowed with early treatment.

There seldom are early symptoms, so specific eye tests are recommended for glaucoma detection.

"If you are 40 or older, please never just assume that you don't have glaucoma. There seems to be an epidemic of undiagnosed glaucoma, because people neglect appropriate eye exams," said Dr. Debra LaPrad, an ophthalmologist at Eye Associates of the South – which has clinics in Biloxi, Ocean Springs and Gulfport.

Glaucoma is a disease that causes increased pressure and damage to your eye's optic nerve, until blindness results. This nerve sends signals from your eye to your brain, where the

signals are interpreted as images you see, LaPrad explained.

Ophthalmologists can slow glaucoma's damage with special eye drops, laser treatments, surgery and natural remedies, she said.

The American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO) recommends you have a comprehensive dilated eye exam for glaucoma at least by age 40. This exam should include an eye pressure check (tonometry) and a visual inspection of your optic nerve (ophthalmoscopy). You also may also require a visual field exam, as determined by an ophthalmologist (medical doctor). Tonometry (eye pressure test) alone is not a reliable indicator, LaPrad added.

For seniors age 60 and older, the National Eye Institute and the AAO recommends this eye exam every 1-to-2 years, or as directed by an ophthalmologist.

"What people just don't hear



This is how the Biloxi Lighthouse would look to someone suffering from an advanced stage of glaucoma. There is a slow loss of side (peripheral) vision, or "tunnel vision," with glaucoma.

is that glaucoma has no early symptoms," stressed Dr. Joel Knight, an ophthalmologist and partner at Eye Associates of the South. "It is often ignored until it reaches a severe stage. So keep getting those comprehensive exams."

If you are at greater risk for glaucoma, see your ophthalmologist more often after age 40. Various sources said risk factors include: Elevated eye pressure,

older age, family history of glaucoma, African, Hispanic or Asian ethnicity, thin corneas, diabetes, nearsightedness or farsightedness, previous eye injury, genetic mutations, or conditions that affect blood flow, such as high or low blood pressure, migraines or heart disease.

For more information or an appointment, call Eye Associates of the South at 396-5185 or visit www.2020view.com.

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