

PRESS RELEASE



TO: Editor in Charge
FROM: Janet M. Scheffer, Mana Means Advertising & Public Relations
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CLIENT: Hawaiian Eye Center

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Glaucoma, The Sneak Thief of Sight

By, Christopher M. Tortora, M.D. - Glaucoma is an eye condition known as the "sneak thief of sight" because in many cases, glaucoma causes permanent loss of vision without any symptoms at all. In some cases, people are virtually blind before they notice a change in vision. Glaucoma, in its most common form, primarily affects those over age 50. Seeing an eye specialist for a complete eye exam can save your vision! Loss of vision in the most common form of glaucoma occurs when nerve damage inside the eye, often due to elevated intraocular pressure, causes gradual loss of peripheral vision. This process can be slow and occur over many years, but is irreversible. There is really no way to know you have glaucoma in its early stages other than by having a complete eye examination. You can't feel the elevated pressure in your eye, and you can't see the early changes in peripheral vision. If the doctor finds evidence of glaucoma, it can be treated to help prevent further vision loss. This is truly a condition in which learning about a problem early gives us a huge advantage in preventing severe vision loss! Everyone should have an eye examination periodically to be sure there is no glaucoma or other eye problem. Every two to four years is fine for younger people with healthy eyes, but for those with risk factors for glaucoma, you should be checked *every year*. Risk factors for glaucoma include:

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- age greater than 60
- Glaucoma in an immediate family member (parent or sibling)
- History of a "high" pressure reading on a past eye exam
- African-American race or African ancestry
- Diabetes
- No eye exam in the past 2 years

Treatment for glaucoma has made significant advances in recent years. It still can not be completely cured, but usually can be controlled when doctor and patient work together. New eye medicines make this easier than ever before. For those who are unable to use medication or do not respond well to them, the options of laser treatment and glaucoma surgery are good ones. A newer laser treatment for glaucoma is now available in which the laser can stimulate the eye's natural pressure-lowering mechanism to help control the condition, without causing damage to the eye itself. This is known as "SLT," or Selective Laser Trabeculoplasty. Since this laser works effectively in many people, we are now often recommending laser as a first step instead of daily use of eye drops. While the effect of the laser does not always last forever, it can often reduce the dependence on eye drops. Checking to be sure you don't have glaucoma requires a full eye examination. The doctor should be taking a good look at the *optic nerve*, the nerve inside the eye. This often requires dilation of the pupils with eye drops in the office. Measuring the pressure, and in some cases, evaluating the peripheral vision is also important. Be sure your doctor is doing a complete eye examination and evaluation for glaucoma on your regular eye check-ups. If you do have the condition, you will need treatment and regular check ups in the doctor's office as well as regular testing to evaluate the optic nerve and visual field. It is critical to use eye medications as directed by the doctor. While use of eye medications for glaucoma is a life-long process for many, the rewards of maintaining good vision through adulthood are well worth it.

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