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Glaucoma Takes Sight without Warning: Optometrists Offer Advice to Help Protect Against Vision Loss

The Colorado Optometric Association emphasizes importance of comprehensive eye exams during National Glaucoma Awareness Month

DENVER, CO (January 1, 2010) – According to the American Optometric Association (AOA), early detection and treatment is critical to maintain healthy vision and protect the eyes from the effects of potentially blinding diseases, such as glaucoma. Studies show that over the next ten years the number of Americans diagnosed with glaucoma will increase by more than one million, yet Americans are still not doing as much as they should to help protect their vision.

Although glaucoma is the second leading cause of blindness in the U.S., awareness of the disease is relatively low. According to data from the AOA's latest American Eye-Q® consumer survey, less than a quarter of all Americans know glaucoma causes damage to the optic nerve. The survey also indicated six in ten Americans incorrectly believe glaucoma is preventable.

While the disease is not preventable, it is treatable, and regular, comprehensive eye exams play a critical role in successful outcomes for patients. Unfortunately, the Eye-Q® survey also found 20 percent of adults who do not wear glasses or contacts have never been to an eye doctor. The Colorado Optometric Association recommends eye exams every two years for adults under age 60 and every year thereafter. Eye doctors may recommend more frequent appointments based on an individual's overall health, risk factors or family history.

"Those individuals who do not visit their eye doctor on a regular basis are putting their vision and quality of life at risk," said COA President Dr. William J. Hoover, OD FAAO. "Glaucoma is often referred to as 'the sneak thief of sight' because it can strike without pain or other symptoms. Vision lost to glaucoma cannot be restored, so early detection and treatment is paramount."

Americans also are not aware of the factors that put them most at risk for developing glaucoma. Only 20 percent of those surveyed indicated knowing that race or ethnicity may increase their risk. According to the Glaucoma Research Foundation, African Americans ages 45 to 65 are 14 to 17 times more likely to go blind from glaucoma than Caucasians. Other risk factors include people who have a family history of glaucoma, are over age 60, or have had severe eye trauma. Some studies suggest high amounts of nearsightedness, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes may also be risk factors for the development of glaucoma. ,

In addition to regular, comprehensive eye exams, the Colorado Optometric Association also recommends incorporating a few easy tips to help save or improve sight:

- Watch that diet: Eat green, leafy vegetables and foods rich in nutrients like beta carotene, vitamin C and zinc to protect eyes from disease.



- Cut down on those bad habits: Cigarettes and alcohol or excessive caffeine intake can all be harmful to the eyes.
- If you work in front of a computer, practice the 20/20 rule: every 20 minutes, take a 20 second break to help avoid eye strain and computer vision syndrome.
- Wear those shades: Both adults and children should wear sunglasses year-round with UV-A and UV-B protection.
- See your optometrist if you are experiencing stinging, itchy, or scratchy eyes, excessive tearing, or any eye discomfort or reduced vision; he or she may recommend artificial tears or tear substitutes, or prescribe medication.

To find a doctor of optometry in your area, or for additional information on glaucoma and other issues concerning eye health, please visit www.aoa.org or www.visioncare.org.

About the survey:

The fourth annual American Eye-Q® survey was created and commissioned in conjunction with Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates (PSB). From May 21 – 24, 2009, using an online methodology, PSB interviewed 1,000 Americans 18 years and older who embodied a nationally representative sample of U.S. general population. (Margin of error at 95 percent confidence level.)

About the American Optometric Association (AOA):

The American Optometric Association represents approximately 36,000 doctors of optometry, optometry students and paraoptometric assistants and technicians. Optometrists serve patients in nearly 6,500 communities across the country, and in 3,500 of those communities are the only eye doctors. Doctors of optometry provide two-thirds of all primary eye care in the United States.

American Optometric Association doctors of optometry are highly qualified, trained doctors on the frontline of eye and vision care who examine, diagnose, treat and manage diseases and disorders of the eye. In addition to providing eye and vision care, optometrists play a major role in a patient's overall health and well-being by detecting systemic diseases such as diabetes and hypertension.

Prior to optometry school, optometrists typically complete four years of undergraduate study, culminating in a bachelor's degree. Required undergraduate coursework for pre-optometry students is extensive and covers a wide variety of advanced health, science and mathematics. Optometry school consists of four years of post-graduate, doctoral study concentrating on both the eye and systemic health. In addition to their formal training, doctors of optometry must undergo annual continuing education to stay current on the latest standards of care. For more information, visit www.aoa.org.

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