



## **WORLD GLAUCOMA WEEK**

### **A Patient's Guide to Caring for their Glaucoma During the Pandemic**

*According to the World Glaucoma Association (WGA), glaucoma is the leading cause of preventable blindness worldwide. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted glaucoma care for patients, hindered early diagnoses, and disrupted access to consultations, exams, and procedures.*

Ophthalmologists around the world are concerned about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the development of irreversible vision loss due to glaucoma. Doctors from numerous countries have become aware of the difficulties that their patients have had returning for ocular exams and check-ups as medical resources were primarily allocated to coronavirus care and patient deferred check-ups due to concerns about COVID-19 exposure in clinics or hospitals.

Results on the impact of the pandemic on glaucoma prevention and treatment have set the tone for this year's World Glaucoma Week (WGW), which takes place worldwide between March 6 and 12. This year's initiative puts a spotlight on empowering patients to address questions and concerns about glaucoma, providing guidance regarding more serious situations, and helping to minimize vision loss from this disease during the pandemic.

#### **ACCESS THE COMPLETE PATIENT GUIDE**

"The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted glaucoma care for patients, causing delays in eye consultations, exams, and procedures which puts glaucoma patients at risk for vision loss from glaucoma. Delays in glaucoma care due to the pandemic together with a backlog of glaucoma-related exams and procedures are burdening our healthcare systems," highlights the World Glaucoma Association (WGA) position document.

Furthermore, the document provides guidelines for the public, including undiagnosed and diagnosed patients. All recommendations are anchored on the premise that glaucoma diagnosis and progression will not wait for the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, thus patients must keep up with their regular ophthalmologist check-ups and routine exams should not be postponed. Expert consensus has emphasized the importance of treatment before there is noticeable vision loss, as this is a late and irreversible symptom of advanced glaucoma.

# **World Glaucoma Week** March 6 - 12, 2022



According to the WGA, if a patient notices vision loss, eye pain or eye discharge, especially if previously operated for glaucoma, they should seek a consultation with an ophthalmologist as soon as possible. In attempt to avoid COVID-19 exposure, the recommendation is to choose an eye clinic that follows all COVID-19 preventive measures and adjusts appropriately for the current pandemic situation in their region, observing the regulations set by the local health agencies.

If a glaucoma patient has contracted COVID-19, they should inform their primary care doctor, who will treat this condition according to current recommendations. The WGA notes that systemic corticosteroids used to treat cases of coronavirus may cause increased eye pressure in some patients, but it usually takes a period of use (a few weeks) for this to occur. If long term use is required, a follow-up with your ophthalmologist is recommended.

The WGA Patient's Guide highlights the importance of evaluating the risks and benefits of participating in a face-to-face consultation. Eye pressure measurements and other important exams are only possible during in-person check-ups. However, if the patient cannot visit clinics/hospitals, the recommendation is to schedule a virtual appointment to ensure personalized medical guidance.

Regular routine exams are an essential part of managing glaucoma. If there are concerns regarding the time involved taking tests and increased exposure to coronavirus, the WGA recommends that the patient reach out to their ophthalmologist to discuss alternatives. Faster imaging tests are available, such as fundus photographs and ocular tomography.

Postponing recommended glaucoma surgery should be avoided. In some cases, surgical intervention is necessary to preserve vision, particularly when laser treatment and eye drops are insufficient to control the disease. As glaucoma damage cannot be recovered, discuss with your eye doctor the most appropriate time for your glaucoma surgery.

Glaucoma is the leading cause of preventable irreversible blindness worldwide. Estimates suggest that approximately 80 million people across the world have the disease. Among people over age 40 years, approximately 2-10% will have glaucoma depending on your ethnic background. There is increased risk with greater age. Prompt diagnosis and treatment of glaucoma can prevent needless vision loss; however, over half those with glaucoma are unaware they have the disease. Many also struggle to access much-needed care. First-degree relatives of people with the disease have up to 10 times more chance to also develop this condition. Senior citizens, African descendants, and women are at greater risk for glaucoma.



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The World Glaucoma Association (WGA) encompasses a network of 91 Glaucoma Societies and 13 Industry Members. WGA's core purpose is to eliminate glaucoma-related disability worldwide. Members are actively involved in glaucoma research, diagnosis/treatment consensus and educational strategies for eye care professionals and the general population.

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