



World Glaucoma Week 2015 - "B-I-G – is Beat Invisible Glaucoma" campaign

Preparations are underway for the 6th World Glaucoma Week March 8-14, 2015. The World Glaucoma Association (WGA) and the World Glaucoma Patient Association (WGPA) work jointly to expand global awareness of this Sneak Thief of Sight: they will launch their 'B-I-G – Beat Invisible Glaucoma' campaign. To achieve a B-I-G network of global glaucoma awareness, the WGA-WGPA team emphasizes that even in 2014, too many people are unaware they have the disease and are receiving no treatment.

Author of the 2014 theme, National Executive Officer of GLAUCOMA AUSTRALIA, Geoff Pollard asserts: 'Low glaucoma detection rates and an increase in glaucoma prevalence as populations age mean BIG solutions are needed to educate communities about glaucoma awareness and the need for regular optic nerve checks to reduce global blindness that's why I support the "B-I-G – Beat Invisible Glaucoma" campaign for World Glaucoma Week 2014.'

What is glaucoma?

Glaucoma is a group of eye diseases that cause progressive damage of the optic nerve at the point where it leaves the eye to carry visual information to the brain. If left untreated, most types of glaucoma progress (without warning nor obvious symptoms to the patient) towards gradually worsening visual damage and possible blindness. This visual damage is mostly irreversible, and this has led to glaucoma being described as the "sneak thief of sight".

Glaucoma is the leading cause of irreversible blindness worldwide, yet 90% could have been prevented. 9 million persons globally are blind from it¹ and this number will rise as the population ages and increases². Owing to the silent progression of the disease - at least in its early stages - up to 50% of affected persons in developed countries are not aware of having glaucoma and are receiving no treatment³. This number rises to 90% in less developed parts of the world.



Real view



View of a glaucoma patient

There are several types of glaucoma. Some may occur as a complication of other visual disorders (the so-called "secondary" glaucomas) but the vast majority is "primary", i.e. they occur without a known cause. It was once believed that the cause of most or all glaucomas was high pressure within the eye (known as intraocular pressure - IOP). Even people without an abnormally high IOP may suffer from glaucoma. High intraocular pressure is a "risk factor" for glaucoma, together with other factors such as ethnicity, family history, high myopia and age.

Some forms of glaucoma may occur at birth ("congenital") or during infancy and childhood ("juvenile"); in most cases however, glaucoma appears after the 4th decade of life, and its frequency increases with age. Men and women are affected equally.



The most common types of adult-onset glaucoma are primary open angle glaucoma (POAG) - a form most frequently encountered in patients of Caucasian and African ancestry - and angle-closure glaucoma (ACG), which is more common in patients of Asian ancestry. Angle-closure glaucoma is often chronic, like POAG, but can sometimes be acute, in which case it usually presents as a very painful ocular condition leading to rapid vision loss and is a true emergency situation.

There is no cure for glaucoma as yet, and vision loss is irreversible. However medications or surgery (traditional or laser) can halt or slow-down further vision loss. Therefore early detection is essential to limit visual impairment and prevent progression towards severe visual handicap or blindness. Your eye-care professional can detect glaucoma in its early stages and advise you on the best course of action.

What can you do to prevent glaucoma?

Currently, regular eye exams are the best form of prevention against significant glaucoma damage.

Early detection and careful, lifelong treatment can maintain vision in most people. In general, a check for glaucoma should be done:

- before age 40, every two to four years
- from age 40 to age 54, every one to three years
- from age 55 to 64, every one to two years
- after age 65, every six to 12 months

Anyone with high risk factors should be tested every year or two after age 35. Those at higher risk include people of African descent, people with diabetes, and people with a family history of glaucoma. You are at increased risk if you have a parent or brother or sister with glaucoma.

Timely diagnosis and appropriate treatment are key to glaucoma prevention

While there are no known ways of preventing glaucoma, blindness or significant vision loss from glaucoma can be prevented if the disease is recognized in the early stages. In its most prevalent form—primary open angle glaucoma—vision loss is silent, slow, and progressive. It typically affects side vision first (peripheral vision) and as it progresses, central vision is lost.

Glaucoma medications slow the progression of glaucoma by reducing elevated intraocular pressure (IOP) to prevent damage to the optic nerve. Surgical treatments are also available.

Benefits of exercise

A regular program of moderate exercise will benefit your overall health, and studies have shown that moderate exercise such as walking or jogging three or more times every week can have an IOP lowering effect. The benefits from exercise last only as long as you continue exercising; this is why moderate exercise on a routine basis is recommended. Yoga can be beneficial, but it's best to avoid inverted positions such as headstands and shoulder stands, as these may increase IOP.

Protect your eyes

Wearing protective eyewear is important when engaged in sports activities or home improvement projects. Eye injuries can result in traumatic glaucoma or secondary glaucoma, so protecting your eyes from injury is another way to prevent glaucoma.

You can find more information on glaucoma by following our links.

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1. World Health Organization data from www.who.int/blindness/causes/priority/en/
 2. Quigley et al. Br J Ophthalmol 2006; 90:262-267
 3. Sommer et al. Arch Ophthalmol 1991; 1090-1095
 4. World Glaucoma Week via www.wgweek.net
 5. Glaucoma Research Foundation (www.glaucoma.org)



Enclosure – Inspiring worldwide World Glaucoma Week initiatives

Thousands of volunteers around the world rallied enthusiastically to the cause of preventing avoidable vision loss by the "sneak thief of sight" during last years' World Glaucoma Week. A selection of WGW-2013 can be found below. More details are available via www.wgweek.net.

Switzerland, Geneva, Tarek Shaarawy reports: "Over 100 international UN workers were screened during our visit at the UN Headquarters. In addition, the opportunity was given to present a lecture on glaucoma."



Brasil, Isis Penido (President ABRAG-Rio) reports: "Here in Rio, ABRAG-Rio (Brazilian Association of Ophthalmology - Rio de Janeiro), opened the Week last Saturday with a conference by the Country's most important glaucoma specialist, Remo Susanna Jr., in the IBOL (Brazilian Institute of Ophthalmology) auditorium. On March 11, free eye exams to the general public at the Zilda Arns family clinic, in the Alemão community were offered."



India, Sushmita Kaushik (Secretary GSI): "The Glaucoma Society of India had organized a co-ordinated nationwide walk on the occasion of the World Glaucoma Week on 10th March 2013. 32 cities across the country walked together at the same time to spread awareness about the disease. Local celebrities from all walks of life like sport, art, music, theatre and films had joined in and participated wholeheartedly. In additions, there were patient education programs, skits about glaucoma and its effects, painting competitions and cycling rallies."



Ivory Coast, Kouya Nean: "Awareness activities in our country included public screening and patient lectures."



More inspiring WGW events are available via www.wgweek.net or the WGW Facebook page.