TuSalud

Glaucoma Is The Leading Cause of Blindness Among Latinos

January is Glaucoma Awareness Month. Here we take a look at what glaucoma is, how it affects Latinos, and what you can do to stop the “silent thief of sight.”

January 19, 2012 By Cristina Gonzalez

More than 2 million Americans are slowly losing their eyesight—andthey don’t even know it. Glaucoma is the second leading cause of blindness inthe United States, with more than 2.2 million Americans diagnosed with thedisease and another 2 million undiagnosed cases losing sight every day. Butglaucoma can be treated, and it can be stopped. And now, during GlaucomaAwareness Month, doctors are urging you to get tested.

What is glaucoma?

Glaucoma is a group of eye conditions that can damage theoptic nerves and ultimately lead to blindness. Everyone, from babies to seniorcitizens, is at risk for glaucoma though some groups are most at risk: peoplewith a family history of the condition, and people—especially Latinos—older than60. In fact, doctors aren’t sure why, but glaucoma is the leading cause ofblindness among Latinos.

What causes glaucoma?

Glaucoma is made up of a few different eye diseases usually(though not always) caused by increased pressure within the eye. This pressurecomes from a buildup of a naturally produced fluid in the eye, a fluid calledaqueous humor.

In the most common form of glaucoma, which is called primaryopen-angle glaucoma, microscopic drainage channels within the eye becomeblocked, causing aqueous humor to drain out of the eye too slowly, building uppressure and damaging the optic nerve—ultimately causing a loss of vision.

In a second form of glaucoma, angle-closure glaucoma, theiris bulges forward and completely blocks drainage. This causes the eyepressure to increase abruptly, again causing nerve damage and vision loss.

Are there any symptoms?

While the day-to-day loss of vision is so minimal that it’salmost undetectable, there are a few symptoms common in both types of glaucoma.These include: a loss of peripheral vision that leads to tunnel vision; severeeye pain accompanied by nausea or vomiting; blurred vision; halos around lights;and a reddening of the eye.

Can glaucoma be treated?

Even though glaucoma can’t be cured and damage can’t bereversed, treatment and regular checkups can prevent further loss of eyesightin people in the beginning stages of the disease—but you have to get tested toknow if you have glaucoma and if so, how much it has progressed. Studies showthat only 38 percent of Latinos are aware of their condition, though it isdiagnosed after simple, noninvasive tests.

Treatments for glaucoma aim to reduce the pressure withinthe eye by improving the movement of the fluid in the eye. The first line oftreatment is usually a medicated eye drop that improves drainage or reduces orincreases the production of fluid. In some extreme cases surgery may beprescribed.

What should Latinos do next?

Emotions and mistrust can all cloud our vision. But theclear reality is that glaucoma can be slowed, it can be treated, and visionloss can be stopped. So get your eyes tested today.

To learn more go to glaucoma.org.

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