



Irish College of
Ophthalmologists
Eye Doctors of Ireland
Protecting your Vision

Media Release

March 7, 2014

Eye Doctors Advise Early Detection is Key to Slowing Progression of Glaucoma

Eye Tests the Only Way to Detect ‘Symptomless’ Glaucoma Early

Certain Groups More at Risk of Developing Glaucoma

World Glaucoma Week 9-15 March, 2014

Often referred to as the ‘silent thief of sight’, glaucoma is essentially symptomless at early stages and the only way to detect it is through regular eye examinations, a spokesperson for the Irish College of Ophthalmologists (ICO), the representative body for eye doctors in Ireland, stated today.

Highlighting World Glaucoma Week, which runs from March 9-15, eye surgeon and glaucoma specialist Dr Aoife Doyle says;

“The importance of having a regular routine eye exam to help prevent avoidable glaucoma-related vision loss cannot be over-emphasised. With early diagnosis and careful regular observation and treatment, damage can usually be kept to a minimum, and good vision can be enjoyed indefinitely.

“Vision loss progresses at such a gradual rate that people affected by the condition are often unaware of it until their sight has already been compromised. It's crucial that people remember that once vision is lost to glaucoma, it cannot be restored”, Dr Doyle, who specialises in medical and surgical treatment of glaucoma patients in Ireland, explains.

During Glaucoma Awareness Week, the Irish College of Ophthalmologists advises the public that the best defence against developing glaucoma-related blindness is by having routine, comprehensive eye exams. The test to detect the condition is non-invasive and gives an immediate result.

Prevalence and Risk Factors

It is estimated that 3% of people over 50 in Ireland has glaucoma. Glaucoma in over 50s in Ireland is expected to increase by 33% between 2011 and 2021, linked to the forecasted increase in our ageing population as projected by the Central Statistics Office. Glaucoma is the highest rising cause of preventable blindness in the western world.

Those most at risk of developing glaucoma are people over 60, people with a family history of the disease and individuals of African and Hispanic descent.

Dr Doyle says, “There are different types of glaucoma and some people are at greater risk and may need to see their eye doctor on a more frequent basis. People of African origin are more at risk of developing glaucoma and of developing it at a younger age. For this reason, regular comprehensive eye exams to catch symptoms early are essential.”

Most Common Form of Glaucoma and Recommended Preventative Measures

Open-angle glaucoma, the most common form of glaucoma, occurs when tissue in the eye gradually becomes less efficient at draining fluid. As this happens, eye pressure rises, causing irreparable damage to the optic nerve. Without proper treatment to halt the nerve damage, open-angle glaucoma patients usually lose peripheral (side) vision first, and then they may eventually go blind. Fortunately, most vision loss from glaucoma can be prevented with early detection and regular medical intervention.

The Irish College of Ophthalmologists recommend that all adults have a baseline, comprehensive dilated eye exam at least by the age 40, the time when early signs of disease and changes in vision may start to happen. The exam, which includes an eye pressure check, may also require a visual field examination, as determined by an eye doctor.

For people age 60 and older, the ICO recommends having a comprehensive eye exam every 1-2 years, or as directed by their GP or eye doctor.

To learn more information about glaucoma or to get eye health advice, visit the Irish College of Ophthalmologists website at www.eyedoctors.ie

How to make an appointment to see an Eye Doctor

If you have a concern about your eye health it is important to have your eyes examined by an eye doctor. For an appointment to see any medical specialist working in the HSE, including eye doctors, you need to get a referral from your General Practitioner (GP). A GP has knowledge of the specialists in his/her area and can ensure that any important information relating to your medical history is passed to the eye doctor.

While it is advisable to seek a referral from your GP many eye doctors working in the community will give you an appointment directly - see [eye doctors](#) in Ireland.

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Ms Aoife Doyle is a Consultant Ophthalmic Surgeon and Glaucoma Specialist at the Royal Victoria Eye and Ear Hospital and St. James's Hospital, Dublin.

FOR FURTHER MEDIA ENQUIRIES OR TO ARRANGE AN INTERVIEW FOR FURTHER EXPERT OPINION, PLEASE CONTACT:

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Notes to Editor

About the Irish College of Ophthalmologists

Established in 1991, the Irish College of Ophthalmologists (ICO) is the recognised training and professional body for medical and surgical eye doctors in Ireland.

The ICO is dedicated to promoting excellence in eye care through the education of its members, trainees and the public. Its goal is to maintain standards of excellence for the restoration of vision and the preservation of sight. We do this by educating eye doctors in training, providing on-going education for eye doctors in practice, giving accurate medical advice to the public and policy guidance for the government.

For further information, visit www.eyedoctors.ie