



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 1, 2008

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MORE WOMEN LOSING SIGHT TO EYE DISEASE THAN MEN

***Prevent Blindness Ohio Urges Women to
Help Protect their Vision with a Dilated Eye Exam***

COLUMBUS, OH – More women than men are diagnosed with vision threatening eye disease every year. Potentially blinding diseases such as glaucoma, cataracts, macular degeneration and diabetic retinopathy strike women in some cases twice as much as men. Although the theories for the cause of this vary, the numbers illustrate a disturbing truth.

An updated report from Prevent Blindness America and the National Eye Institute shows that not only have the numbers of age-related eye disease risen across the board, but that women are still largely more affected than men. For example, of the more than 2 million Americans age 50 and older that have AMD, more than 1.3 million of those cases are women. And, of the 4.4 million Americans ages 40 and older that have diabetic retinopathy, 2.3 million are female.

Of the more than 4.4 million Americans age 40 and older who suffer from visual impairment, including blindness, 2.3 million are women. Vision impairment is defined as having 20/40 or worse vision in the better eye even with eyeglasses. Prevent Blindness Ohio has designated April as Women's Eye Health and Safety Month to raise awareness of these issues.

“Some may be under the impression that losing vision is just simply part of the aging process but these numbers include many women in their 40's,” said Sherill Williams, President and CEO of Prevent Blindness Ohio. “But, vision loss is not a natural part of aging! It's never too early to start caring for our eyes, and we strongly encourage women to make eye health a priority for themselves and their families today.”

The 2008 update from the “Vision Problems in the U.S.” study confirmed earlier projections that as the baby boomer population continue to age, the number of those diagnosed with vision problems is also increasing. Vision loss not only detracts from quality of life, it also has a significant burden on the U.S. economy. Prevent Blindness America estimates that costs associated with visual impairment and blindness costs \$51.4 billion year.

Dry eye syndrome, a condition where not enough natural tears are produced, is far more common in women as well. Approximately 6 million women and 3 million men have moderate to severe symptoms of dry eye syndrome, according to the National Women's Health Resource Center. It is more frequent in post-menopausal and pregnant women, due to hormonal fluctuations. In the most extreme cases, the cornea can become damaged without the proper lubrication.

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Prevent Blindness Ohio urges all Ohioans to see an eye doctor immediately if they have the following symptoms:

- Unusual trouble adjusting to dark rooms;
- Difficulty focusing on near or distant objects;
- Squinting or blinking due to unusual sensitivity to light or glare;
- Change in color of iris;
- Red-rimmed, encrusted or swollen lids;
- Recurrent pain in or around eyes;
- Double vision;
- Dark spot at the center of viewing;
- Lines and edges appear distorted or wavy;
- Excess tearing or "watery eyes";
- Dry eyes with itching or burning; and
- Seeing spots or ghost-like images.

Most eye diseases that rob vision have no symptoms. The best way for women to protect their vision for a lifetime is to get regular, comprehensive eye exams, even if there are no symptoms. Only an eye doctor can effectively diagnose eye problems and, if detected early, can help to minimize any loss of vision.”

For more information on eye disease or a listing of Prevent Blindness Ohio vision services, please call 800-301-2020 or visit www.pbohio.org.

Prevent Blindness Ohio, founded in 1957, is Ohio’s leading volunteer nonprofit public health organization dedicated to preventing blindness and preserving sight. We serve all 88 Ohio counties, providing direct services to more than 800,000 Ohioans annually and educating millions of consumers about what they can do to protect and preserve their precious gift of sight. Prevent Blindness Ohio is an affiliate of Prevent Blindness America, the country’s second-oldest national voluntary health organization. For more information or to make a contribution, visit our website at www.pbohio.org or call 800-301-2020.

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WOMEN'S EYE HEALTH AND SAFETY PSA

:30 PSA

EYE DISEASE AFFECTS MORE WOMEN THAN MEN. IN FACT, MORE WOMEN HAVE GLAUCOMA, CATARACTS, MACULAR DEGENERATION AND DIABETIC RETINOPATHY. MOST EYE DISEASES THAT ROB VISION HAVE NO SYMPTOMS. THE BEST WAY FOR WOMEN TO PROTECT THEIR VISION FOR A LIFETIME IS TO GET REGULAR, COMPREHENSIVE EYE EXAMS, EVEN IF THERE ARE NO SYMPTOMS. THERE IS NO CURE FOR THESE DISEASES, BUT VISION LOSS CAN BE MINIMIZED WITH EARLY DETECTION AND TREATMENT. PLEASE CALL PREVENT BLINDNESS OHIO AT 800-301-2020 OR VISIT WWW.PBOHIO.ORG TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT EYE HEALTH TOPICS AND VISION SERVICES IN YOUR AREA.

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WOMEN'S EYE HEALTH & SAFETY TALKING POINTS

GENERAL WOMEN'S EYE HEALTH

- Of the 4.4million Americans age 40 and older who are visually impaired, 2.3 million are women.
- Out of the estimated 20.5 million Americans age 40 and older with cataract, 12.7 million women are affected. Age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD) affects 1.65 million Americans age 50 and older, and like cataract, affects more women than men. This trend is repeated in Ohio where women, as a population, experience a higher incidence of eye diseases. About 1.6 million women are affected by vision impairment and eye diseases compared to 1.1 million men. Of the four leading eye diseases, women outnumber men in every category*:

VISION PROBLEMS IN OHIO	Male	Female	Total
Age-related Macular Degeneration: Age 50+	25,301	45,812	71,113
Cataract: Age 40+	327,723	551,494	879,217
Diabetic Retinopathy: Age 18+	100,384	116,477	216,861
Glaucoma: Age 40+	32,813	59,072	91,884

*Based on data from the 2002 *Vision Problems in the U.S.* report from Prevent Blindness America and the National Eye Institute.

- According to *the Women's Eye Health Task Force*, risk factors for premature death due to heart disease or cancer are the same as those for blindness and vision impairment. These factors include, smoking; excess weight; imbalanced, unhealthy diet; lack of exercise and exposure to UV rays.

DRY EYE SYNDROME

- 3.2 million American women over the age of 50, or one in 12, have chronic dry eye.
- About 6 million women and 3 million men have moderate to severe symptoms of dry eye syndrome. Another 20-30 million people have mild cases of the disease. It affects women two to three times more than men. (Healthwomen.org)
- Menopause brings dry eyes because estrogen controls the tear glands, so a reduction in estrogen causes a reduction in tears. (*Corneal Research Laboratory, University of Rochester*).
- Some people are unable to produce enough natural tears, leaving the eyes dry and irritated. It is more frequent in postmenopausal and pregnant women, due to hormonal fluctuations. There is no cure, but the condition can usually be controlled through the use of over-the-counter eye drops (artificial tears).
- Hispanic and Asian women are more likely to be affected by symptoms of chronic dry eye. (Healthywomen.org)
- In rare cases, dry eye can become serious – leading to eye infections or a damaged cornea. That is why it is important to visit an eye care professional if you think you have dry eye.
- Using a humidifier, avoiding cigarette smoke, and using artificial tears and/or ointments can help relieve discomfort.
- Prevent Blindness America offers these tips to help lower the incidence of eye diseases in women:

Eat Healthy and Stay Fit- The *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* found that the risk of cataracts can be lowered by eating 3½ servings of fruits or vegetables a day. Green leafy vegetables especially contain loads of nutrients for the eye. Pairing a healthy diet with exercise will reduce the risk of diabetes.

Take Supplements- Antioxidants have been shown to actually reduce the progression of some eye illnesses, including AMD. Vitamin A, riboflavin (vitamin B2), vitamin C and zinc are good sources to help maintain eye health.

Quit Smoking- Besides the typically known side effects of smoking including cancer, lung disease, etc., it also increases the risk for eye diseases.

Wear UV Eye Protection- When venturing outdoors, Prevent Blindness America recommends wearing brimmed hats in conjunction with UV-rated sunglasses (labeled: absorbs 99-100 percent of UV-A and UV-B rays). UV rays are extremely dangerous for the eyes.

Know Your Family History- Genetics plays a key role in eye disease. Research your family's health history and notify your eye care professional of any eye diseases that run in the family.