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Women More Susceptible to Sight-Threatening Eye Diseases and Conditions

Prevent Blindness America Urges Women to Make an Appointment for an Eye Exam Today

CHICAGO (March 22, 2010) – Of the many health differences between men and women, many may not be aware of the fact that women are more affected by eye disease and other eye conditions than men. Every year, more women than men are diagnosed with eye diseases such as glaucoma, cataracts, macular degeneration and diabetic retinopathy. Women may experience changes in vision in various stages of their lives including pregnancy and post-menopause.

The 2008 “Vision Problems in the U.S.” study from Prevent Blindness America and the National Eye Institute consistently shows that more women are diagnosed with major eye diseases. And, of the more than 3.6 million Americans age 40 and older who suffer from visual impairment, including blindness, 2.3 million are women. Prevent Blindness America has designated April as Women’s Eye Health and Safety Month in an effort to encourage women to make their vision health a priority and schedule a dilated eye exam.

Women are also more susceptible to dry eye syndrome, a condition where not enough natural tears are produced. 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.

Women who are pregnant or receiving fertility treatments may experience changes in their vision. Because of an increase in hormones, some may notice refractive changes, dry eyes, puffy eyelids that obscure side vision and sensitivity to light due to migraine headaches. Some vision changes in pregnant women, such as blurred vision and seeing spots, may be signs of a more serious problem and should be discussed with a doctor immediately as this may be a sign of diabetes or high blood pressure. All women who are diabetic and pregnant or who are planning to become pregnant should get a full, dilated eye exam.

And for older women, a recent study published in the March 2010 issue of *Ophthalmology* showed that women who are post menopausal and receiving Hormone Replacement Therapy

(HRT) treatments may be at an increased risk for cataracts. (A cataract is a clouding of the lens in the eye, the part of the eye that focuses light and produces clear images.) The study by Birgitta E. Lindblad, MD, Sundsvall Hospital, Sweden as part of the Swedish Mammography Cohort (SMC), states that of the more than 30,000 postmenopausal Swedish women studied who were using or had used HRT had significantly higher rates of cataract removal compared with women who had never used HRT. The “Hormone Replacement Therapy in Relation to Risk of Cataract Extraction: A Prospective Study of Women” data showed the risk for cataract removal was increased by 14 percent in women who had never used HRT and by 18 percent in current HRT users. And, longer duration of HRT use correlated with increased risk.

“Although more research needs to be completed regarding linking cataract increases with HRT, the message is clear that all women need to take the time to take care of their eyes today in order to maintain healthy vision in the future,” said Hugh R. Parry, president and CEO of Prevent Blindness America. “No matter what age you are, it’s never too early to start visiting your eye doctor and scheduling regular dilated eye exams.”

For more information on eye diseases such as cataracts, changes in vision due to pregnancy, or a listing of Prevent Blindness America services in your state, please visit preventblindness.org or call (800) 331-2020.

About Prevent Blindness America

Founded in 1908, Prevent Blindness America is the nation's leading volunteer eye health and safety organization dedicated to fighting blindness and saving sight. Focused on promoting a continuum of vision care, Prevent Blindness America touches the lives of millions of people each year through public and professional education, advocacy, certified vision screenings and trainings, community and patient service programs and research. These services are made possible through the generous support of the American public. Together with a network of affiliates, divisions and chapters, Prevent Blindness America is committed to eliminating preventable blindness in America. For more information, or to make a contribution to the sight-saving fund, call 1-800-331-2020 or visit us on the Web at preventblindness.org.

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