



News

“Don’t Lose Sight” National Campaign Aims to Educate Americans about Macular Degeneration ***Actress Jane Seymour Joins Fight Against Leading Cause of Blindness***

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CHICAGO – More than 15 million Americans are affected by macular degeneration, a leading cause of blindness and severe vision loss for people 50 and older. Actress Jane Seymour has partnered with Prevent Blindness America (PBA), the nation's leading volunteer eye health and safety organization, to announce “Don’t Lose Sight” – a movement to educate adults ages 40-69 about their risk for macular degeneration.

In a recent study conducted by Prevent Blindness Americaⁱ, 96 percent of Americans believe that vision retention is important to overall quality of life. However, nearly 40 percent of people are unaware that a disease like macular degeneration exists and can be responsible for vision loss.

“Macular degeneration gradually destroys the sharp, central vision needed for reading, driving, identifying the face of a loved one, watching television, reading and performing other daily tasks,” said Dr. Michael Cooney, a New York City ophthalmologist who has done extensive research into eye health and macular degeneration. “In some cases, macular degeneration advances so slowly that people will see little effect on their vision as they age.”

Seymour is personally affected by macular degeneration. Her mother, Meike, now 92, was diagnosed with the disease more than 20 years ago. As a result of macular degeneration, she can’t recognize people’s faces and can’t read without using a special magnifying glass. Seymour has watched her mother’s struggle with macular degeneration and wants to educate others about the disease. Seymour recently participated in “a day without sight” using a special pair of simulation glasses to illustrate the effects of macular degeneration.

“During my day without sight, I struggled to complete basic daily activities like reading a book because it was extremely difficult to view things in front of me unless I was very close to them,” said Seymour. “However, I realized just how devastating macular degeneration can be when I encountered a friend and was unable to see her face until I was literally nose-to-nose with her. I cannot imagine being unable to see the faces of my children, husband, relatives and friends.”

There are several risk factors for macular degeneration including family history, aging, smoking, and inadequate nutrition. Research has proven that lutein and omega-3s are two nutrients critical to eye health, but even the healthiest diets don’t supply the proper amount. Mounting scientific evidence suggests that nutritional supplements are important in protecting the health of your eyes.

“Eyes need sustenance to stay healthy in the same way that bones need calcium,” said Dr. Cooney. “Proper nutrition and regular examinations are vital to eye health, particularly as people age.”

According to the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, the Seddon study, conducted by Dr. Johanna Seddon of Harvard University, found that the highest correlation of macular degeneration prevention was associated with an intake of 6 mg per day of lutein, which led to a 43 percent lower prevalence of disease.

However, the Prevent Blindness America study also revealed that only half of Americans know proper nutrition, like vitamins, can improve eye health.

“Because there is no cure for macular degeneration, Americans must consider how this disease can affect their daily lives and take preventive steps before it is too late,” said Daniel D. Garrett, senior vice president of Prevent Blindness America. “Regularly scheduled eye exams are the first line of defense in avoiding vision loss.”

Also launching today is the “Don’t Lose Sight” campaign interactive, educational website www.dontlosesight.org. This online portal offers resources to consumers including risk assessment tools and an opportunity to submit questions regarding macular degeneration to Dr. Cooney.

Please visit www.dontlosesight.org for additional information.

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Media Contacts:

Sarah Hecker
Prevent Blindness America
Phone: 312-363-6035
shecker@preventblindness.org

Meredith Isola
Phone: 202-729-4197
meredith.isola@ogilvypr.com

Rachelle Luchsinger
Phone: 303-634-2671
rachelle.luchsinger@ogilvypr.com

About “Don’t Lose Sight”

“Don’t Lose Sight” is a national awareness campaign aimed at educating adults ages 40-69 about their risk for macular degeneration. With more than 15 million Americans affected by the disease today, and the incidence of macular degeneration expected to triple by 2025, *Don’t Lose Sight* is empowering Americans to fight the disease by making eye health a priority. The movement will offer an online resource for questions regarding macular degeneration and information about eye health. The website, www.dontlosesight.org, will provide an eye assessment test and an opportunity for consumers to learn more in an interactive forum.

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, 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, it's 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 www.preventblindness.org.

ⁱ The study was conducted online from October 2 – October 5, 2006 among 1,045 online adults across the United States. Figures for gender, age, and geography were weighted where necessary to match their actual proportions in the population.