

Long-Term Care Survey Alert

Clinical Developments EYE DROPS CAN DELAY GLAUCOMA ONSET IN HIGH-RISK RESIDENTS

Long-term care providers may be able to help stave off glaucoma in residents with elevated eye pressure.

Researchers have discovered that eye drops can help delay--and possibly prevent--people at high risk for glaucoma from developing the sight-stealing disease that is a leading cause of blindness.

Scientists have found that pressure-lowering eye drops reduced by more than 50 percent the development of the most common form of glaucoma. The findings are reported in the June 2002 issue of Archives of Ophthalmology.

The study, known as the Ocular Hypertension Treatment Study, examined 1,636 people 40-80 years of age who had elevated eye pressure but no signs of glaucoma. Half were assigned daily eye drops and the other half were assigned to observation but received no treatment. "The study clearly makes a connection between elevated eye pressure and the onset of glaucoma. However, not all people with elevated eye pressure should be treated with the eye drops," says Paul Sieving, director of the National Eye Institute. The decision to use the drops should include the individual's treatment preferences, health status and life expectancy..

Comprehensive eye exams are recommended for all people over age 60 and for African Americans over age 40. If detected early, glaucoma can usually be controlled with medication. Without an eye exam, the first sign that a resident may have glaucoma is peripheral vision loss where he appears startled by people or objects approaching from the side.