

The World is Bright, Save Your Sight: Why You Should Take Your Eye Checks Serious

The eye, though a small member of the body, is a delicate and essential organ of sight, serving an important function in human existence.^[1] It is responsible for an individual's communication with the world. Over 80% of tasks are accomplished with the aid of the eyes.

For the past 10 years, the World Glaucoma Association and the World Glaucoma Patient Association have earmarked the second week in March annually as the World Glaucoma Week celebration. This is an effort to create global awareness on the menace of glaucoma worldwide and the need to address the untoward sequelae of blindness from the disease.

Glaucoma is a group of optic nerve diseases characterized by specific structural damage and functional visual decline.^[2,3] Although not exclusively, it is usually associated with increased intraocular pressure, which is the only modifiable risk factor, i.e., all forms of treatment employed in glaucoma care are targeted toward lowering this pressure in the eyes (the intraocular pressure).^[4,5]

Glaucoma is the leading cause of avoidable irreversible blindness and the second most common cause of blindness worldwide.^[3,6-8] About 50%–90% of individuals with glaucoma are unaware they have this condition, mainly due to its initial asymptomatic nature, reason it is called the “silent thief of sight.”^[3,7] This is because by the time someone with glaucoma becomes aware that there is a problem, almost half of the cells responsible for transmission of the visual signals have been lost.^[5]

The asymptomatic nature of the disease, poor health-seeking behavior of people alongside other economic and healthcare hindrances account for late presentation of patients for medical care at advanced stages when one or both eye is already blind.^[7] At this late stage of the disease, blindness from glaucoma becomes a life-long reality most individuals with it must live with as it is irreversible. It is no respecter of age, gender, educational prowess, or societal status. Glaucoma is quite prevalent yet underdiagnosed, and the number of those with the disease increases as the population increases.^[2]

Different types of glaucoma exist but the focus of this issue will be on Primary Open Angle Glaucoma, which is the most prevalent type, with a global prevalence of 2.4%, and Africa has the highest prevalence of 4% among the continents.^[2,6,8] In Nigeria, out of the over 1 million people that are estimated to be blind, glaucoma accounts for about 16.3% of the causes of blindness.^[7] The burden of glaucoma is multidimensional as its impact goes beyond sight loss to affect the social, psychological, and economic aspects of an individual's life.^[2]

Glaucoma is such an important disease that a whole week has been set aside to create awareness of the disease and strengthen advocacy for its early detection and treatment to forestall avoidable blindness from it. Annually, the second week of March has been tagged “World Glaucoma Week.” The theme for year 2022 is “The World is bright, Save your sight.”

The central message of the World Glaucoma Week bothers on creating awareness about the disease as the level of glaucoma awareness is low.^[7] This awareness about the disease will be hinged on getting people at increased risk of developing the disease, e.g., individuals of the black ethnicity, first degree relatives of glaucoma patients, people aged 40 years and above, individuals with increased intraocular pressure to schedule into their health routine the habit of regular eye examinations.^[2] This is captured under the four-pronged strategies (4Ps) of caring for the eyes proposed by the International Agency for Prevention of Blindness during the World Sight Day 2021.^[1] The 4Ps stand for Prevent, Protect, Preserve, and Prioritise. These can be adopted in glaucoma awareness and advocacy plans as it is an important public health disease. The main aim of awareness is that once people have knowledge of the disease, the need for regular eye examinations and they adopt these practices, they can continue to see the bright world they live in, which is beautiful, promising, and full of opportunities.^[7]

Prevention entails adopting a healthy lifestyle, eating healthy, preventing, and treating systemic diseases that are linked to glaucoma, e.g., Hypertension, Diabetes, acquiring the needed information to guide against blindness from glaucoma and actively incorporating regular eye examinations to enhance early disease detection, if present.

Protecting and preserving the eyes from blinding glaucoma involves encouraging safe eye practices like preventing ocular trauma, counseling against unsupervised or indecent use of steroids which can in turn prevent development of the secondary forms of glaucoma.^[5] Requesting for and ensuring to get a regular and detailed dilated eye examination is also paramount. In addition, prompt treatment of glaucoma either with use of eye drops, lasers, or surgery to lower the pressure in the eyes, prevent disease progression and needless blindness are strategies under this category.

Prioritization entails a conscious effort on the part of individuals to put their eye and general health first and advocate for incorporation of comprehensive eye examination into routine medical care, while educating other members

of the public to adopt a similar approach. The eye health workers and the government also have a daunting role to play to ensure this is achieved at the various levels of eye care by strengthening and making glaucoma care services easily accessible.^[3] It is only when the eyes are examined that sight-threatening conditions like glaucoma can be discovered early and treated promptly.

Ordinarily, routine eye examination may not prevent the development of glaucoma but serves the chance to reduce avoidable blindness which is achievable in a patient's lifetime through early diagnosis and prompt treatment.^[7] With adequate treatment, vision can be preserved, and this is the central point of every glaucoma awareness venture.

Awareness of glaucoma as the leading cause of irreversible blindness globally is key.^[7] The strategies outlined need to be adhered to strictly for early identification of individuals with glaucoma to allow for quick treatment. Individuals with visual impairment or blindness from glaucoma can also be rehabilitated to achieve their utmost potential in life and contribute to societal development, despite the limitations of poor sight. However, prevention is known to be better than cure. Thus, it is a call for us all to strive to preserve our sights so that we may keep beholding the beauty of this bright and adventurous world.

Indeed, the world is bright and beautiful. We can continue to behold this beauty by prioritizing our eye health and taking the necessary steps to preserve our vision. The world is bright, save your sight!

Financial support and sponsorship

Nil.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

Olabisi O. Yeye-Agba¹, Osamudiamen Cyril Obasuyi², Maryam Babba Danagundi³, Ugochukwu Anthony Eze⁴, On behalf of Academic Committee of Young Ophthalmologists Forum of the Ophthalmological Society of Nigeria⁵

¹Department of Ophthalmology, Federal Medical Centre, Lokoja, ²Department of Ophthalmology, Irrua Specialist Teaching Hospital, Edo, ³Department of Ophthalmology, Aminu Kano Teaching Hospital, Kano, ⁴Department of Ophthalmology, Federal Medical Centre, Asaba, Nigeria, ⁵Academic Committee of Young Ophthalmologists Forum of the Ophthalmological Society of Nigeria

Address for correspondence: Dr. Ugochukwu Anthony Eze, Department of Ophthalmology, Federal Medical Centre, Asaba, Nigeria. E-mail: ugoexeze@gmail.com

REFERENCES

1. How to Love Your Eyes – The International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness. Available from: <https://www.iapb.org/world-sight-day/how-to-love-your-eyes/>. [Last accessed on 2021 Dec 12].
2. Varma R, Lee PP, Goldberg I, Kotak S. An assessment of the health and economic burdens of glaucoma. *Am J Ophthalmol* 2011;152:515-22.
3. Kyari F, Gilbert C, Blanchet K, Wormald R. Improving services for glaucoma care in Nigeria: Implications for policy and programmes to achieve universal health coverage. *Br J Ophthalmol* 2017;101:543-7.
4. Garg A, Gazzard G. Selective laser trabeculoplasty: Past, present, and future. *Eye (Lond)* 2018;32:863-76.
5. Mahabadi N, Foris LA, Tripathy K. Open Angle Glaucoma. [Updated 2022 Feb 21]. In: StatPearls [Internet]. Treasure Island (FL): StatPearls Publishing; Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK441887/>. [Last accessed on 2021 Dec 19].
6. Kyari F, Entekume G, Rabi M, Spry P, Wormald R, Nolan W, *et al.* A population-based survey of the prevalence and types of glaucoma in Nigeria: Results from the Nigeria National Blindness and Visual Impairment Survey. *BMC Ophthalmol* 2015;15:176.
7. Abdull MM, Chandler C, Gilbert C. Glaucoma, “the silent thief of sight”: Patients’ perspectives and health seeking behaviour in Bauchi, northern Nigeria. *BMC Ophthalmol* 2016;16:44.
8. Zhang N, Wang J, Li Y, Jiang B. Prevalence of primary open angle glaucoma in the last 20 years: A meta-analysis and systematic review. *Sci Rep* 2021;11:13762.

This is an open access journal, and articles are distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 License, which allows others to remix, tweak, and build upon the work non-commercially, as long as appropriate credit is given and the new creations are licensed under the identical terms.

Access this article online	
Quick Response Code: 	Website: www.njmonline.org
	DOI: 10.4103/NJM.NJM_203_21

How to cite this article: Yeye-Agba OO, Obasuyi OC, Danagundi MB, Eze UA. The world is bright, save your sight: Why you should take your eye checks serious. *Niger J Med* 2022;31:119-20.

Submitted: 20-Dec-2021

Revised: 12-Feb-2022

Accepted: 12-Feb-2022

Published: 29-Apr-2022