

LOW VISION ISSUES AMONG AFRICAN AMERICANS



Aging increases risk of developing low vision disorders. However, other factors like ethnicity can also impact potential of certain eye diseases.

A recent poll by Research!America found that a majority of African American respondents, 57 percent, feared vision loss and said it would have a great impact on their lives – more so than fears of losing speech, memory, and hearing. Additionally, 66 percent of African Americans feared that loss of vision would impact their independence, while 59 percent feared it would have on their quality of life.ⁱ

While vision loss and low vision disorders affect all Americans, African Americans are disproportionately affected. According to the NEI, nearly 200,000 African Americans suffer with low vision, and that number is expected to increase to 366,000 by 2030.ⁱⁱ

Impact of Low Vision on African Americans

Cataracts

More than 1.9 million African Americans have cataracts. This population is nearly two times more likely to develop cataracts, compared to other ethnic groups.ⁱⁱⁱ

Diabetic Retinopathy

Currently, there are 828,000 African Americans with diabetic retinopathy, a number that could exceed 1 million by 2030, according to the NEI. Despite this increased risk, nearly 7 in 10 African Americans do not know about this disorder or how it impacts the eye.^{iv}

More than 13.2 percent of African Americans have been diagnosed with diabetes^v, compared with 12.8 percent of Hispanic Americans and 7.6 percent of non-Hispanic white Americans. Diabetes is a chronic condition that affects the way the body metabolizes sugar and puts people at risk for developing diabetic retinopathy. High intake of calories and sodium appear to be associated with the progression of diabetic retinopathy. It is important for individuals to have their diabetes under control to prevent the onset or progression of the eye disorder.

Glaucoma

The NEI reports that more than 530,000 African Americans have glaucoma, a number expected to rise to as many as 860,000 by 2030. This condition is a leading cause of blindness among African Americans and Hispanics in the U.S. Open-angle glaucoma, the most common form of this condition that impact peripheral vision, is four times more likely to occur among African Americans than among non-Hispanic whites.^{vi}

Glaucoma is **15 times more likely to cause blindness** in African Americans than in Caucasians.^{vii}

Protect Your Vision

 <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Regular, comprehensive exams with an eye care provider can help diagnose these disorders when they are most treatable.	 <ol style="list-style-type: none">2. Consult a low vision specialist on the latest tools and devices to enhance remaining vision – including magnifiers, telescopic eyewear and portable handheld video magnifiers – to help those with low vision maintain or regain their independence.	 <ol style="list-style-type: none">3. Create a tailored plan to treat low vision with a coordinated care team, including primary care doctor and low vision specialist, and determine if medical procedures or drug interventions provide optimal treatment.
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ⁱ“Attitudinal Survey of Minority Populations on Eye and Vision Health.” Research!America, Research to Prevent Blindness and Alliance for Eye and Vision Research (AEVR). August 2014. <http://www.researchamerica.org/uploads/AEVRRApoll.pdf>

ⁱⁱ“African Americans and Eye Health: Low Vision.” African Americans and Eye Health: Low Vision. National Eye Health Education Program, Jan. 2015. Web. 30 Jan. 2015.

ⁱⁱⁱLeske, M. “Nine-year Incidence of Lens Opacities in the Barbados Eye Studies.” *Ophthalmology* 111.3 (2004): 483-90. Web. 24 Jan. 2015.

^{iv}“High Caloric and Sodium Intakes as Risk Factors for Progression of Retinopathy in Type 1 Diabetes Mellitus.” *JAMA Ophthalmology*. January 2010. <http://archophth.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=424640>

^v“Statistics About Diabetes.” American Diabetes Association. N.p., n.d. Web. 09 Apr. 2015.

^{vi}“Glaucoma in the African-American and Latino Communities: Studies Release More Data.” *Eyenet*. June 2010. <http://www.aao.org/publications/eyenet/201006/upload/CU-Glaucoma-June-2010.pdf>

^{vii}Glaucoma Facts & Statistics. BrightFocus Foundation. <http://www.brightfocus.org/glaucoma/about/understanding/facts.html>