



East Florida Eye Institute

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 20, 2009

Eye Exams Can Help Your Heart

February is American Heart Month. Learn how a simple, non invasive exam may detect your risk of heart disease.

STUART, FL (February 20, 2009) -- As we celebrate American Heart Month in February, it's a great time to learn more about how a comprehensive eye exam can help your heart health. During American Heart Month, you'll probably hear a lot about protecting your heart and looking for signs of cardiovascular diseases like high blood pressure, heart disease and stroke. A trip to the eye doctor can also play an important role in identifying these diseases before symptoms show up elsewhere in the body, allowing for earlier, possibly more effective treatment. Many of these conditions can also cause vision loss when not managed effectively.

The Role of Eye Examinations in Detecting Cardiovascular Disease

Early signs of heart disease can be detected by trained ophthalmologists during preventive eye exams. Through careful examination of the retina, your eye doctor can view small changes in the blood vessels in the back of the eye, which can indicate more serious systemic disease. Due to their enormous demand for oxygen, tiny retinal blood vessels can be easily damaged by high blood pressure.

In fact, the eye is the only area of the body where doctors can get an unobstructed view of blood vessels in the human body. More and more research is showing that the type and severity of changes in the retina can be predictors for intensity of cardiovascular disease including stroke, high blood pressure and even heart failure. Recent advancements such as digital retinal imaging allow your eye doctor to quickly and painlessly detect and monitor blood flow in your retina.

"Several large-scale studies indicate that abnormalities of the blood vessels in the retina can be used to predict patients' risk for diabetes, hypertension (or high blood pressure), stroke and heart disease", said Ronald Frenkel, MD, Director of East Florida Eye Institute (www.efei.com) and The Eye Research Foundation, located in Stuart, FL. Frenkel was selected as a Top Doctor in 2008 & 2009, per Castle Connolly, a nationally recognized, independent physician ranking organization. "At East Florida Eye Institute, we house the most comprehensive retinal imaging equipment on the Treasure Coast. We can measure retinal blood flow, document retinal disease progression without the use of injectable dyes and evaluate the retina more completely", said Frenkel. Abnormal blood vessels can play a role in macular degeneration, diabetes of the eye, and glaucoma. Often the patient has no symptoms off early treatable forms of these diseases which can prevent vision loss.

It has recently been shown that retinal abnormalities are a good predictor of whether a patient will develop high blood pressure or die of cardiac disease in the next 10 years. "My hope is that one day, all people will get regular eye exams as an additional means to identify risk and help identify people who may benefit from early lifestyle changes and preventive therapies", Frenkel said.

Diagnosing High Blood Pressure Through The Eyes

Hypertension (high blood pressure) is known as a "silent" disease because its victims often lack symptoms. It affects approximately 65 million Americans, and only 34% of them have it under good control. During a comprehensive eye examination, your eye doctor checks for many subtle changes in the retina resulting from high blood pressure, a condition also known as hypertensive retinopathy. These changes to the retina may include narrowing of the small blood vessels in the retina, arteries pressing down on veins and flame-shaped hemorrhages, among other complications. If these changes are seen, your eye doctor will work with your primary care doctor to ensure you receive appropriate and timely treatment.

Vision Loss Due to Cardiovascular Diseases

Some cases of hypertensive retinopathy can be sight threatening, as with blockage of the retinal veins, referred to as retinal vein occlusions. Due to thickening of the walls of smaller arteries, hardened arteries “pinch” the veins, forming what is called a branch retinal vein occlusion. Vision loss can occur when blood obstructs the retina, the eye is deprived of oxygen or the macula swells. When the central retinal vein becomes blocked, vision loss can become more pronounced. Obstruction of the arteries and blood vessels in the retina can be temporary or permanent and can cause vision loss when a blockage disrupts blood flow in the eye.

A Healthy Cardiovascular System Means Healthier Eyes

More and more research shows that risk factors that can indicate or lead to heart damage are also harmful to the eyes. Smoking, obesity and high cholesterol levels put both your heart health and your sight at risk. Exercising, maintaining a proper weight and eating a heart healthy diet rich in omega-3s, antioxidants and soluble fiber will help improve both heart and eye health. (Always consult with your doctor before engaging in any exercise or diet program.)

Those interested can contact East Florida Eye Institute for a FREE cardiovascular eye health screening at 772-287-9000 or email them at info@efei.com. We might just tell you something you didn't know about your heart!

+ +

About East Florida Eye Institute

Ronald Frenkel, M.D. F.A.C.S. is a board Certified and Harvard fellowship trained ophthalmologist. Dr Frenkel is a Voluntary Associate Professor of Ophthalmology at Bascom Palmer Eye Institute, University of Miami, Miller School of Medicine. He has authored book chapters and over 50 peer reviewed publications and abstracts, and serves as a scientific reviewer for numerous ophthalmology journals. Dr Frenkel is an American Academy of Ophthalmology Achievement Award recipient and has been selected as a Top Doctor by Castle-Connolly for 2008 *and* 2009.

Richard Grodin, M.D. is a board certified and fellowship trained ophthalmologist. His practice focuses on disease of the retina. Dr Grodin serves as a Principal Investigator for several of the nation's leading retinal clinical trials. He is also on staff at Bascom Palmer Eye Institute, University of Miami.

Nhu Truong, O.D. is a board certified optometric physician. Dr Truong served on the faculty of Nova Southeastern University where she instructed optometric physician students in the ophthalmic clinical arts. At East Florida Eye Institute, she manages comprehensive ophthalmology patients and complex disease such as macular degeneration and glaucoma.

Shamim Haji, MD is a macular degeneration and glaucoma clinical fellow. In his capacity as a Clinical Research Fellow at Mount Sinai School of Medicine, New York he participated in numerous clinical trials which have led to FDA approved ophthalmic medications.