

Health Today

Keeping eye disease in check



Gary J. LeBLANC
Common Sense Caregiver

Sundown Syndrome

Biological clock causes difficulties as Alzheimer's disease progresses

It's 4:45 p.m. — Everybody gets a new name, possibly two. My father, who doesn't seem to need a clock, goes through this change daily due to Alzheimer's disease.

Sundown syndrome — also known as sun downing — is a term describing the onset of heavier confusion and intensified agitation. Usually this begins anywhere from late afternoon to dusk. In reality, it could happen anytime throughout the day.

Experts believe one of the contributing factors is a shift in their biological clock, caused from the change of daylight to dark.

Keeping the house well lit during these hours could help immensely.

Physical and mental exhaustion is probably the biggest culprit. An Alzheimer patient's day consist of coping with who's who, "where am I," and living in the past. This



phone calls, the list goes on. If the traffic's high-volume in your home, try placing them in a quieter room.

There are days when I swear my father's sundowners will last morning 'til night and I've also noticed a difference on dispiriting rainy days.

Once anxiety builds, it's difficult to turn around. Keep their evenings as routine and simple. Just do the best you can.

*Gary Joseph Le Blanc is the primary caregiver of his father who has been stricken with Alzheimer's disease for more than 8 years. He can be written to **Hernando Today** at 15299 Cortez Blvd., Brooksville, FL 34613 or e-mailed at us41books@bellsouth.net.*

Blood Bank

Today — Hernando County Court House, 20 N. Main St., Brooksville, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.; Cemex Brooksville Quarry, 1430 Campbriene Road, Brooksville, 12:30 to 4 p.m.

April 24 — Oak Hill Hospital, 11375 Cortez Blvd., Brooksville, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Meal Ticket; Michael's, 7131 Coastal Road, Brooksville, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.; 40 percent off purchase; Beef O'Brady's, 7601 Horse Lake Road, Brooksville, 4 to 7 p.m., 10 percent off meal

April 25 — Wal-Mart, 2163 W. County Road 48, Bushnell, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.; St. Theresa Catholic Church, 1107 Commercial Way, Spring Hill, 3 to 7 p.m., Chick-Fil-A coupon

April 26 — St. Theresa Catho-

There are no cures for most age-related eye diseases so keeping eyes healthy early pays off.

By VIRGINIA DIAZ
Hernando Today correspondent

The eyes, it's said, are the windows to the soul. Scientifically, they are one of the most miraculous of the body's organs.

"The eye is your brain looking out and taking in," says Maria Scunziano-Singh, M.D. "Your brain is going to process everything through the eye."

"The eye receives the most blood flow of any organ in the body," explains ophthalmologist Keith Stolte, M.D. of Stolte eye Center in Spring Hill. "It is the most metabolically active one because it is constantly taking energy, sunlight and converting it to electrical signals that go to the brain."

That process is so intensive during our every waking minute, says Stolte, it depletes brain cells responsible for vision, which are then replaced at night when we sleep. "They call it transduction."

The vision robbing diseases of the eye that come with age like glaucoma, macular degeneration and diabetic retinopathy are all, in a way, related to the depletion of the nutrients the blood carries to the blood vessels of the eye as well as the deterioration of the vessels themselves. The effect is damage to the retina and the optic nerve.

Although there are treatments that can slow the progress of these diseases, there are no absolute cures. When it



One thing that you can't get with frames ordered online is a properly fitted set. Lauren O'Connor is a trained optician at Stolte Eye Center in Spring Hill. Opticians fit frames and take measurements to make sure the lens provide the best corrective vision and suggest modifications that preserve eye health. For example, O'Connor always advises anti-glare lens which preserves 12 percent of your night vision when driving.

you're going to have an optic nerve problem," Stolte explains. He says some in the medical field believe glaucoma is directly related to blood flow.

"We don't know if the pressure is damaging the nerve mechanically or squeezing those little blood vessels and the blood is not getting to where it needs to go. So we're going to be a balance between getting the blood pressure where it's high enough to profuse the brain and the eyes but not high enough to cause a stroke."

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First aid for eyes

Accidents happen — even to your eyes. If you have an emergency, Prevent Blindness America suggests the following actions:

If you get a speck in your eye:

- Don't rub it
- Try to let tears or eyewash flush it out
- If that doesn't work, lift the upper eyelid outward and down over the bottom lid

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HEALTHY EYES

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Nutrition and the eye

A lot of the research on eye disease is becoming more and more focused on nutrition. For instance, vitamins and minerals are increasingly being used to combat age-related macular degeneration (ARMD).

ARMD is the leading cause of blindness among Americans over 60 according to information gathered by the National Eye Institute. An estimated 1.75 million Americans suffer from advanced AMD and by 2020 that number will almost double to 3 million. Caucasians, especially those with light eye colors, and women are particularly susceptible.

The macular is located in the center of the retina in the back of the eye. It converts light into electrical impulses and sends it to the brain. The function of the macular is to allow us to see fine detail. When its cells break down, we lose the sharp, central vision needed for every day tasks like reading and driving.

There are two types of AMD — wet and dry.

Wet AMD is always advanced and is the more dangerous kind. It can cause vision loss very quickly.

Wet AMD occurs when weak, abnormal blood vessels behind the retina start to grow under the macula. They break and leak blood and fluid, which leads to permanent damage to retinal, cells

which in turn causing blind spots in central vision.

Dry AMD occurs when the macula's cells slowly break down. 85 percent of people with intermediate and advanced AMD have the dry form

The latest research on treatments to slow the progress of intermediate AMD is focused on nutrition and vitamin therapy.

"Right now the absolute latest, greatest materials involve the omega 3 fatty acids, their effect on the eye, and anti-oxidant therapy, says Scunziano-Singh.

Anti-oxidants are found, for example in berries and leafy green vegetables like spinach and kale. Broccoli and tomatoes are also high in anti-oxidants. Nuts and seeds are high in zinc. But the high-doses of antioxidants and zinc needed won't be found in over the counter vitamins.

And, Scunziano-Singh stresses it's not advisable to self medicate. "You need to know how much zinc to take. If you don't, zinc can offset other elements such as copper and selenium," says Scunziano-Singh. "All these things have to be in proper balance."

Research on two other compounds, zeaxanthin and lutein, have been linked to improved eye health. Lutein is an anti-oxidant that is concentrated in the macula. It's believed to protect the eye from damage caused by free radicals that come from the harmful rays of the sun. Both compounds are related to beta-carotene, which gives vegetables like carrots and fruits their colors.

"Lutein is a good vitamin for overall retinal health for macular degeneration, wet or dry" says Jonathan Edwards, C.O.T, and Administrator at Stolte Eye Center.

As encouraging as the research is, the National Eye Institute (NEI) stresses that there is no hard evidence yet that conclusively shows that either compound lowers the risk for AMD.

It's also important to note that while therapies can slow and control the progression of the disease they can't repair existing damage.

Correcting vision

For people who don't suffer from these conditions, corrective lenses, contact lens and laser surgery solve vision problems.

According to Vision-Watch (Jobson Medical Information and Vision Council of America) that includes most of the population. Their research as of June 2006, shows approximately 168.5 million United States residents use some form of vision correction. That is 75 percent of the adult population. It's a business that generates approximately 7 billion dollars a year.

Choosing frames and lenses should involve more than a fashion statement because in the end, it's about being able to see.

Buying a pair of glasses can be a chore. Frames come in all colors. They come in lots of shapes and sizes and are made of plastic or from one of a variety of metals. It's a very personal decision but there are some practical

considerations. Making a choice has to start with the kind of corrective lens you need.

"You need more depth with a bi-focal with a line then with a progressive, says Lauren O'Connor, the optician at Stolte Eye Center. It also depends on how the person wears the glasses. If they wear them really close to their face, or close to their nose."

When it comes to progressives, there are stock lenses that are a bit less costly but provide a narrower corridor for mid-range vision. The more expensive short corridor progressives extend that mid-range and there is less distortion at the ends.

"The cheaper you go, the less lens you get. But a little bit more expensive you get a wider area, smoother transition into each level," says O'Connor.

Most lenses today are polycarbonate, which is a plastic like material that's impact resistant, and shatter proof.

UV protection and scratch guard are usually ground into the lens when the glasses are made. Those come standard with progressives. Anti-glare is also ground into the lens. It costs extra, but it's advisable to have it.

"It's good for nighttime driving," says O'Connor. What people don't realize is without an anti-glare you lose 12 percent of your vision. It allows correct lighting behind the eye and keeps unwanted rays out."

Frames are made from either plastic or metals that include trivec, stainless steel and titanium. If someone has sensitive skin, it's good to find out

if the frame has nickel in it because that can cause an allergic reaction.

Buying eyeglasses on line may be cost effective but there are some things to keep in mind. Every pair of glasses is custom-made and an optician has to take careful measurements otherwise you won't be able to see clearly through your expensive new glasses. Consumer advocates advise people to keep that in mind and suggest that this is one case where the personal touch may be the better way to go.

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**crime
info
online**

For more crime information in your neighborhood, log on to the Hernando County Sheriff's Office Web site at hernandosheriff.org. Follow the link to H.C.S.O. crime mapping. For further information, call 352-754-6830.