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CATARACT PATIENT NUMBERS EXPECTED TO INCREASE DRAMATICALLY BY THE YEAR 2020

National Non-profit Group Provides Free Information on Cataracts and Treatment

CHICAGO (July 20, 2006) – Today, one in every six Americans ages 40 and older, or 20.5 million, are affected by cataracts, the clouding of the eye's lens which blocks light needed for sight. Cataracts are the leading cause of blindness in the world, according to the World Health Organization. And by the year 2020, it is estimated that more than 30.1 million Americans will have cataracts. It is the leading cause of low vision in the United States, contributing to half of all cases.

"Some people might think that developing cataracts is just a part of getting older," said Daniel D. Garrett, senior vice president of Prevent Blindness America. "But the good news is that vision loss from cataracts is not necessarily permanent. In fact, many people can have their vision restored through help from their eye doctor."

Prevent Blindness America has declared August as Cataract Awareness Month and provides free information to the public on the subject. The national eye health and safety organization also offers "Your Guide to Cataract Surgery," a complete handbook which includes general cataract information as well as tips on what to expect before and after surgery.

More than 1.6 million Americans undergo cataract surgery each year, making it the most frequently performed surgery in the country. And according to the American Academy of Ophthalmology, most surgeries are performed as an outpatient procedure under local anesthesia. The surgery has a 95 percent success rate with generally a minimal recovery time. Many medical insurance policies cover cataract surgery, including Medicare.

Unfortunately, there are no current medications that can cause cataracts to go away or to avoid developing them at all. But, there are things you can do lower your risk factors including quitting smoking and wearing UV-protective sunglasses when outdoors. And since some cataracts are caused by eye injuries, it is important to wear proper eye protection at work and at play. In fact, childhood eye injuries can lead to cataracts and glaucoma later in life. Eating a diet rich in antioxidants and controlling diabetes may also delay cataract development.

Because cataracts generally are painless, patients might not realize a problem right away. Symptoms may include blurred or double vision, or a milky or yellowish spot that surfaces in the pupil.

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“Regular eye care plays a critical role in vision health as we age,” added Garrett. “Only after working with their eye doctor can patients can access whether cataracts are interfering with their quality of life and when to get treatment.”

For more information on cataracts in both English and Spanish, or to receive the “Your Guide to Cataract Surgery” brochure, call 1-800-331-2020 or log on to www.preventblindness.org.

About Prevent Blindness America

Founded in 1908, Prevent Blindness America is the nation's leading volunteer eye health and safety organization dedicated to fighting blindness and saving sight. Focused on promoting a continuum of vision care, Prevent Blindness America touches the lives of millions of people each year through public and professional education, advocacy, community and patient service programs and research. These services are made possible through the generous support of the American public. Together with a network of affiliates, divisions and chapters, it's committed to eliminating preventable blindness in America. For more information, or to make a contribution to the sight-saving fund, call 1-800-331-2020 or visit us on the Web at www.preventblindness.org.

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