

Fighting Glaucoma

Laser procedure can eliminate or reduce the need for costly medication.

When computer programmer Kevin Gray needed a new pair of glasses, he got more than an updated prescription when he visited an optometrist. A routine exam revealed elevated pressure within his eyes. It was the first clue that he might have glaucoma, an eye disease that can cause irreversible vision loss if left untreated.

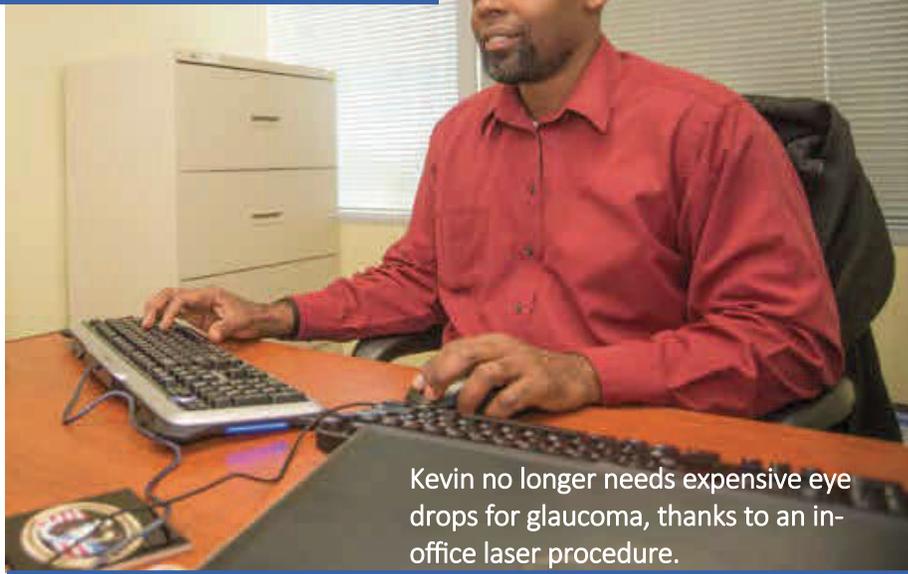


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The optometrist referred Kevin to glaucoma specialist James N. McManus, MD, at The Eye Institute for Medicine & Surgery. After more testing, Dr. McManus confirmed Kevin had developed glaucoma and needed treatment to preserve his sight. “I wasn’t having any other symptoms,” Kevin recalls. “My grandmother had glaucoma, so I guess I’ve got the precursor for it.”

A symptom of glaucoma is increased intraocular pressure that damages the optic nerve over time. It is caused by poor drainage of the fluid that nourishes the eye’s lens and cornea. The back-up of fluid increases pressure within the eye. Only in rare cases can patients feel this buildup of pressure.

Kevin was prescribed eye drops that control glaucoma by reducing eye pressure. His instructions were to place a single drop daily in each eye, a regimen



Kevin no longer needs expensive eye drops for glaucoma, thanks to an in-office laser procedure.

he faithfully followed for seven years. The eye drop therapy kept his glaucoma in check but became increasingly expensive. He was paying about \$100 every month for his prescription when he decided to look for another answer. “The eye drops were cost prohibitive,” says Kevin.

Recently, he underwent an in-office procedure at The Eye Institute for Medicine & Surgery that made it possible to throw away the eye drops. The treatment is selective laser trabeculoplasty, or SLT, a brief laser procedure designed to increase fluid drainage inside the eye. SLT gently applies laser energy to the eye’s drainage tissue, a tiny, spongy area called the trabecular meshwork. The result is better fluid drainage and therefore less pressure

“If someone has tried all the medicated drops available and they haven’t responded, instead of having a more invasive surgery, this minimally invasive procedure can be done first,” says Dr. Darlington, “It can be a safe alternative to control glaucoma.”

on the optic nerve.

“I didn’t feel any discomfort at all. It seemed similar to one of my routine eye exams,” notes Kevin about having the procedure. “First, they applied some fluid to numb the eye. In all, it took less than five minutes. I had the first eye done, and the other eye was treated a week later.”

Impressive Results

A recent chart study at The Eye Institute for Medicine & Surgery indicates that SLT can be an effective alternative to glaucoma medications and eye drops.

For the retrospective study, Dr. McManus reviewed more than 100 charts of his patients who have undergone SLT. “The results were very impressive,” he reports. “Seventy-five of the hundred patients in the study either eliminated the need for their glaucoma medications or reduced the number of medications they needed to take on a daily basis.”

Sixty-two of those patients were able to stop their glaucoma medications entirely. That is good news for many reasons, adds Dr. McManus. When SLT eliminates or reduces the need for daily eye drop therapy, patients who previously weren’t taking glaucoma medications as directed or skipping doses be-

Fighting Glaucoma: Continued

cause of cost will no longer be risking vision loss. The latest generation of glaucoma medications is highly effective but requires the patient to be vigilant about compliance, notes Dr. McManus. Ignoring directions can, over time, lead to vision loss, even when a physician is following the patient.

Some patients may be non-compliant because of physical limitations. For example, they can't place drops correctly in the eye because of tremors due to Parkinson's disease or other neurologic disorders. Having a condition like rheumatoid arthritis can present challenges with even opening the medication bottle. Busy lifestyles can interfere with daily eye drop therapy, too.

"Many patients simply have numerous responsibilities and are always on the go. This is often why they forget to use their glaucoma medications every day," says Dr. McManus.

The high cost of glaucoma medications is another obstacle for many patients, he adds. When patients find the medications to be cost prohibitive, studies

have shown many will skip doses to make their supply of drops last longer. "It's understandable when patients feel that they can't afford their medication. But they are risking their vision. If vision loss occurs, it is frequently permanent," warns Dr. McManus.

The chart study at The Eye Institute for Medicine & Surgery also examined the potential financial impact on the US health care system when SLT eliminates the need for expensive eye drops to treat glaucoma.

Using life expectancy tables from the Social Security Administration, Dr. McManus and his team completed a cost analysis. Their conclusion: On average, when a patient no longer needs typical glaucoma medications, expected savings can be in excess of \$16,000 over his or her lifetime after being treated with SLT.

New Glaucoma Surgery

A new surgery for glaucoma is now available at The Eye Institute for Medicine & Surgery. Using a new device called the Kahook Dual Blade, glaucoma specialist Jason K. Darling-

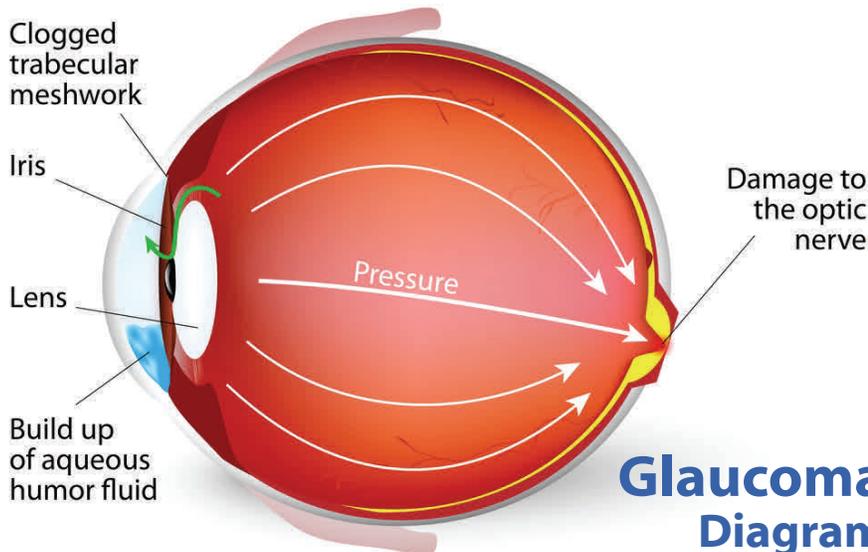
ton, MD, is able to improve fluid drainage inside the eye to lower intraocular pressure and preserve the health of the optic nerve. The outpatient procedure is minimally invasive and takes less than 15 minutes.

"I can easily perform the surgery through a micro-incision, which is what makes it minimally invasive," assures Dr. Darlington.

"This is a very good procedure for patients who have a diagnosis of glaucoma and are undergoing cataract surgery. It can be done at the same time," he adds. "Afterward, they are likely to need less glaucoma medication or be off their medication entirely."

The Kahook procedure is also an alternative for glaucoma patients who have developed allergies to eye drops for glaucoma or aren't responding adequately to medications.

"If someone has tried all the medicated drops available and they haven't responded, instead of having a more invasive surgery, this minimally invasive procedure can be done first," says Dr. Darlington. "It can be a safe, alternative way to control glaucoma."



COMPREHENSIVE EYE CARE & EYE SURGERY

The mission of The Eye Institute for Medicine & Surgery is to bring the most current medical and surgical advances in eye care to the residents of the Space Coast, and to deliver these services in a warm and friendly setting.

For a consultation with Dr. Darlington, Dr. McManus, or any of the eye care specialists at The Eye Institute, please call **(321) 722-4443**.

There are four offices to serve you:

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To schedule an appointment with one of the eye specialists at The Eye Institute for Medicine & Surgery, please call **(321) 722-4443** or visit www.SeeBetterBrevard.com

Appointments are available in the Rockledge, Melbourne, Palm Bay & Titusville offices.