

## "Cold" Laser To Treat Glaucoma

A "cold" laser to treat glaucoma is safe and the treatment is long-lasting, according to a new study by Lawrence F. Jindra, M.D., a Floral Park ophthalmologist. For many people, the procedure eliminates the need for daily prescription eye drops.

Often called the "sneak thief of sight," glaucoma is a leading cause of blindness. People can go for years without symptoms, and by the time they begin to notice changes in their vision, irreversible damage has occurred.

"Early detection is the key to saving sight," says Dr. Jindra, Chief Emeritus of the Division of Ophthalmology at Winthrop University Hospital on Long Island. Once people are diagnosed, treatment options include prescription eye drops or laser treatment.

Dr. Jindra's study, based on 10-year follow-up data, found that the SLT laser is a safe and effective first-line treatment for glaucoma with a lasting effect. He presented his research earlier this year at the Annual Scientific Symposium of the American Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgery.

Selective laser trabeculoplasty, known as SLT, was approved by the Food and Drug Administration in 2001. "The laser treatment takes only a few minutes in the doctor's office and causes little to no

discomfort, nor side effects to speak of. It is covered by Medicare and most insurance plans," Dr. Jindra explains.

"Although prescription eye drops are also effective in controlling glaucoma, patients must remember to use them every day for the rest of their lives," he adds. "The medications may cause side effects and can be costly. Studies show that up to 40 percent of patients do not use the eye drops as prescribed."

Dr. Jindra's study found that the SLT laser proved to be successful long-term in significantly lowering pressure inside the eye, the goal in treating glaucoma. In an analysis of almost 2,000 eyes treated with SLT as the primary therapy, the cumulative probability of success at 10 years was 90 percent.

Dr. Jindra was one of the first physicians in the United States to acquire the SLT laser. Sometimes called a "cold laser," it has the ability to zero in on specific pigment-containing cells to lower pressure in the eye caused by a buildup of fluid. It is a gentler treatment compared to the traditional argon laser used in the past. "SLT has less energy than the average laser used to scan groceries at the supermarket checkout," Dr. Jindra said.

In the most common form of glaucoma, the drainage system in the eye fails to function

properly. "If you compare the eye to a sink, it's like having a clogged drain," Dr. Jindra explains. "Fluid cannot leave the eye as quickly as it is produced, causing it to back up, and this leads to increased pressure in the eye." If the pressure is not controlled, it can damage the optic nerve and cause permanent and irreparable vision loss.

"In this day and age, it's a tragedy for anyone to experience vision loss or go blind because of glaucoma," Dr. Jindra says. "Regular eye exams, timely diagnosis, and early and effective treatment are the best ways to preserve one's precious sight, especially if someone has risk factors for the disease."

For more information about glaucoma, visit [www.jindramd.com](http://www.jindramd.com).

### Glaucoma: A Leading Cause of Blindness

Glaucoma has no early warning signs, and left untreated, it can lead to permanent vision loss or blindness. Regular eye exams, especially for those at increased risk, are important. People can go for years without symptoms, and by the time they begin to notice changes in their vision, irreversible damage has occurred.

Left untreated, the disease initially leads to a loss of peripheral vision. People may have the impression they are looking through a tunnel. Over

time, their remaining straight-ahead vision may deteriorate until they lose their sight altogether. Although there is no cure, researchers have found that promptly diagnosing and treating people who have early stage glaucoma can delay progression of the disease.

The American Academy of Ophthalmology has the following recommendations with respect to glaucoma screenings: People of any age with glaucoma symptoms or glaucoma risk factors, such as those with diabetes, a family history of glaucoma, or African Americans or those of African descent over age 40, should see an ophthalmologist for an exam. The ophthalmologist will let you know how often to return for follow-up exams.

Adults with no symptoms of or risk factors for eye disease should have a complete eye disease screening by age 40 — the time when early signs of disease and changes in vision may start to occur. Adults 65 or older should have an eye exam every one to two years, or as recommended by their ophthalmologist.