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Rosemary Shrager admits she is terrified about going blind after revealing glaucoma runs in the family

RENOWNED chef and TV personality, Rosemary Shrager, has revealed she is 'extremely worried' about losing her sight after several close family members went blind due to glaucoma. She is now working with Specsavers to raise awareness of the importance of regular eye tests this National Eye Health Week (September 23-29) to ensure the nation doesn't lose the picture.

Glaucoma affects more than 700,000 people across the UK and a whopping 64 million people around the world¹. The condition is often symptomless which means many don't realise they have it, putting them at risk of losing their sight.

Rosemary, 68, knows this more than most and gets regular checks after some of her relatives lost their sight as a result of the condition, a prospect she says is terrifying.

She says: 'There is a history of glaucoma in my family. My father, sister, grandmother and two aunts all had it, and as it is often hereditary it is a terrifying thought that I could get it too.'

Glaucoma is the name given to a group of eye conditions in which the main nerve in the eye (the optic nerve) becomes damaged, usually as a result of increased pressure in the eye. The most common type of glaucoma (primary open angle glaucoma) starts very slowly, and to begin with there are no symptoms. So some people don't realise they have the condition until it is fairly advanced.

¹ <https://www.glaucoma-association.com/about-the-iga/what-we-do/campaigns/men-more-likely-to-have-significant-glaucoma-sight-loss/>

Dr Nigel Best, Specsavers clinical spokesperson says: 'There are several factors which can increase your risk of developing glaucoma. As in Rosemary's case, a family history of the disease increases the chances, but other risk factors include those who have black-African or Asian heritage as well as those who have higher levels of short sightedness. Of course, age also needs to be considered as two in every 100 people over the age of 40 are affected with the condition.

'The good news is glaucoma can generally be treated effectively if detected early, and in most cases, daily eye drops are used.'

During her eye check, Rosemary's optician noticed that her optic nerve is thinning in one corner. While she does not yet have glaucoma, it does need to be closely monitored. As a result, each time she goes to her local Specsavers store in Tunbridge Wells her eyes are looked at with an Optical Coherence Tomography (OCT) machine. This cutting-edge piece of equipment - usually only found in hospital eye departments but now available in more than half of Specsavers stores - is used for a variety of functions including screening and management of conditions such as age-related macular degeneration, glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy.

Karen Osborn Chief Executive of the International Glaucoma Association (IGA) says: 'We regularly hear from people who have permanently lost sight to glaucoma because of late diagnosis. People are often angry and upset to learn that simple regular visits to their local high street optometrist could have detected the condition. The earlier treatment starts, the more likely that someone will retain useful sight for life.'

Rosemary adds: 'As a chef my work is my sight – I couldn't do what I do without it. Cooking is my livelihood so it is so important that I do all I can to look after myself to ensure I can carry on.'

'I'd urge everyone to make getting their eyes tested a priority. Some people think they don't have to go to the opticians as they think their sight is fine, but they check for so much more than just your vision. It is the most important thing.'

Your eyes can reveal a lot about your health so it's really important to have regular eye tests – once every two years, or more often if recommended by your optometrist. To find out more or book your next appointment head to your nearest Specsavers store or visit www.specsavers.co.uk.

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