What Your Eyes Say About Your Health

Your eyes may be the window to your soul, but did you know they also provide doctors with important clues about your overall health?

Eye exams are often a means for early detection of a number of medical conditions. For instance, skin cancer may be seen in an eye exam when an abnormal growth is detected on the eye or eyelid.

Diabetes can damage blood vessels in the eyes, and although this occurs over time as diabetes progresses, it is sometimes the eye doctor who discovers the undiagnosed condition during a routine exam. High blood pressure can also be detected.

Autoimmune conditions, such as inflammatory bowel disease, psoriasis, which affects the skin; psoriatic arthritis, which affects the joints; and ankylosing spondylitis, a form of arthritis that affects the joints of the spine, may also be discovered, says OCB Ophthalmologist Lana Rifkin, MD. Dr. Rifkin specializes in uveitis, an inflammatory condition of the eyes that is a feature of certain autoimmune conditions and therefore a sign that something else may be going on in the body.

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Dr. Rifkin often tests patients with uveitis for a genetic marker called HLA-B27. People who have this gene may be predisposed to inflammatory conditions of the eyes, back, joints, and gut, she said.

“Recently, a 30 year old male who came in with recurring uveitis appeared astonished when, during the eye exam, I asked him whether he has low back pain and if he was having gastrointestinal issues,” says Dr. Rifkin. “His response was, ‘You’re an eye doctor, why are you asking me this and how do you know this?’”

She referred the patient to a gastroenterologist and he was diagnosed with ulcerative colitis, an inflammatory condition of the colon, and was promptly treated.

Rheumatoid arthritis may also be detected in some patients who develop an eye condition called scleritis, which causes redness and pain in the eyes. Dr. Rifkin recalls a patient with severe scleritis who was in a wheelchair when she was examined. After running a series of tests, Dr. Rifkin diagnosed her with granulomatosis, a rare and potentially fatal condition that affects blood vessels. Once treated, the patient no longer required the wheelchair.

“The next time I saw her, I didn’t recognize her,” Dr. Rifkin recalls. “She was up walking around, clear-eyed and full of energy. It was very rewarding to see her doing so well.”

It is important to have your eyes examined, even if you do not think you have a vision problem, she says. The American Academy of Ophthalmology recommends having a baseline eye exam at age 40, and an annual exam after the age of 65.

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OCB is first in New England to offer new advanced procedure to treat glaucoma

OCB is proud to be the first practice in New England to offer the iStent Inject Trabecular Micro-Bypass System – a new and innovative procedure that allows doctors to treat glaucoma at the time of cataract surgery. The iStent Inject implant is clinically proven to reduce intraocular eye pressure in adult patients with mild-to-moderate primary open angle glaucoma.

OCB glaucoma specialist Michael Oats, MD, performed the first iStent Inject implant procedure in August at Cape Cod Eye Surgery & Laser Center. Dr. Oats said he is very pleased that his initial patient and 12 other patients who subsequently underwent the procedure were experiencing appropriate decreases in eye pressure.

“This is an exciting option for every cataract patient in our community that is living with glaucoma,” said Dr. Oats. “While the patient is having cataract surgery, we can alter the course of a potentially blinding disease in a matter of minutes at no additional risk to the patient. The procedure is very safe and it is the most up-to-date procedure available that we can offer. ”

With glaucoma, intraocular eye pressure increases because the channels that normally drain fluid from the eye become blocked. Higher than normal eye pressure can damage the optic nerve, causing irreversible vision loss. In the past, glaucoma surgery was reserved for severe cases. This procedure can be offered at mild through moderate stages and patients are typically able to reduce the burden of taking glaucoma eye drop medication.

The iStent Inject system is the latest advance in minimally invasive glaucoma surgical (MIGS) procedures that in recent years have offered up a menu of new treatment options for patients with glaucoma. It includes two tiny implants, which are considered the smallest medical devices known to be implanted in the human body. Together, these tiny implants create two bypasses, or openings, between the front part of the eye and its natural drainage pathway, restoring the eye’s natural ability to drain fluid.

“Since we are putting in two tiny stents instead of one, we are more likely to achieve a lower pressure and therefore more likely to decrease a patient’s reliance on eye drops,” said Dr. Oats.

All OCB glaucoma specialists offer MIGS procedures. For more information, schedule an evaluation with your OCB ophthalmologist who can discuss whether this procedure is right for you. You can also visit our website at www.eyeboston.com.
Diabetes can steal your sight

Diabetes is the leading cause of blindness among adults ages 20-74 in the United States. November is recognized as Diabetes Awareness Month and OCB eye doctors want to remind patients who are diabetic or prediabetic to get a comprehensive dilated eye examination once a year. Diabetic retinopathy has no symptoms in its early stages. Vision loss associated with diabetes can be prevented with early detection.

Coming Soon: OCB Falmouth

OCB is pleased to announce the opening of our newest practice location in Falmouth. OCB Falmouth will open this winter and is located at 186 Jones Road. The new location offers OCB’s patients who live in the Falmouth area a convenient location closer to home!

Dr. Fine elected NEOS President

OCB Congratulates Laura Fine, MD, who in June was elected to serve a one-year term as President of the New England Ophthalmological Society. NEOS, founded in 1884, is a non-profit organization with more than 700 members that is dedicated to the study and advancement of ophthalmology.

Dr. Fine (6th from right) is pictured here with the NEOS Executive Board.

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