

Disease leads to vision loss more often in blacks

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Black people are more likely to lose vision as a result of idiopathic intracranial hypertension, or increased pressure in the brain, according to a study published in the March 11, 2008, issue of *Neurology*, the medical journal of the American Academy of Neurology.

“The racial difference does not appear to be based on differences in diagnosis, treatment or access to care,” said study author Beau Bruce, MD, of Emory University School of Medicine in Atlanta, GA. “The disease affects black people more aggressively. Doctors may need to monitor their black patients more closely and take steps to prevent vision loss earlier than with other patients.”

The cause of idiopathic intracranial hypertension is not known. Symptoms include headache, ringing in the ears, and vision problems such as blurriness and double vision. It is most common in young, obese women.

For the study, researchers reviewed the medical records of all patients at Emory University with intracranial hypertension over a 17-year period. Of the 450 people, 197 were black. There were 246 whites, five Hispanic people and two Asian people in the study.

The black patients were 3.5 times more likely to have severe vision loss in at least one eye, and they were nearly five times as likely to become legally blind than the non-black patients.

Bruce noted that the blacks in the study had other risk factors, such as higher body mass index and higher frequency of low blood iron, and higher pressures around the brain than non-black participants, and that these factors could partially account for the increased risk of vision loss.

Source: American Academy of Neurology

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