

Study finds people with vision loss from glaucoma at higher risk of falling

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(Medical Xpress) -- A world-first Queensland University of Technology (QUT) study has found that people suffering from more extensive vision loss from glaucoma are at a higher risk of having a fall than those with better vision.

Dr. Alex Black from QUT's Faculty of Health, found 40 per cent of the 70 older adults with glaucoma who took part in the year-long study had a fall, with 20 per cent experiencing multiple falls over that period.

Dr. Black said the key finding of his study was that the strongest risk factor for falls among the glaucoma sufferers was more extensive loss in their lower [peripheral vision](#).

"This is significant because it means we can now turn our attention to finding ways to help prevent these patients from having falls," he said.

"While it may sound like common sense that people with impaired vision would experience more falls than those with good vision, this was the first study that identified the particular type of glaucoma sufferer most at risk.

"Armed with this knowledge we can move onto educating patients so they can better understand the extent of their [vision loss](#) and its ramifications on their day to day living."

Dr. Black said there were a range of measures that could be introduced

to help [glaucoma](#) sufferers with lower peripheral [vision impairment](#) reduce the likelihood of falls. These involved modifying [environmental factors](#), such as removing trip hazards from the home and improving lighting, as well as promoting behavioural change to reduce their high-risk activities.

"This involves things like exercising in good sunlight rather than at dawn or dusk and taking time when doing highly active activities such as bushwalking.

"Stairs and steps should be well-lit and outlined with contrasting tape or paint so they can be easily seen and people are best to take time to allow their eyes to adjust when walking from light to dark areas and vice-versa.

"Activities that maintain and promote balance and strength such as Tai Chi are also advised."

Dr. Black said the above advice was applicable to the general older population, in addition to those with vision impairment.

His research has been published in the November issue of *Optometry and Vision Science*, the official journal of the *American Academy of Optometry* [is.gd/SbmSJK](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.optom.2019.11.001)

He said eye diseases often develop gradually over time, and these can affect balance and perception of depth.

Dr. Black said at least one third of people aged over 65 suffered a fall each year, making falls one of the leading causes of injury-related hospital admissions among [older adults](#).

"It's important that [people](#) have regular eye examinations with an

optometrist to detect, monitor and treat any eye problems as they arise."

More information:

Fast facts on falls:

- Falls account for more than 40 per cent of injury-related deaths, and one per cent of all deaths of older Australians
- Around 20 per cent of falls result in injury requiring medical treatment
- In 2002, more than 1,300 older Australians died as a result of a fall
- More than 55,000 older Australians were hospitalised for injuries sustained from falling during 1999-2000.

Provided by Queensland University of Technology

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