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John's glaucoma detected in time

Regular checks key to reducing blindness

By Caitlin Madden



**“I couldn't see what tree my golf balls went into”
said John Reid**

Cricket legend John Reid, plays golf, though not in wet or cold weather, takes care of his vegetable garden, walks his dog, reads, helps out at the local hospice and is writing and researching for his fourth book.

But things may have been made much more difficult if he did not get on to his glaucoma early. About four years ago John discovered he had glaucoma in his right eye, calling it “something that creeps up on you”.

“You don't notice it at all until it's too late, he said.

This month is Glaucoma Awareness Month and John said having eye exams regularly when you “get to a ripe old age” is the key.

Glaucoma is a group of eye diseases in which the pressure inside the eye causes damage to the nerve of sight (optic nerve), leading to vision loss – or even blindness.

It is estimated that about 68,000 New Zealanders over the age of 40 have glaucoma and as many as half of those don't know they have it.

He said what tipped him off that something was wrong was when he was out playing golf.

“I couldn’t see what tree my balls went into,” he laughed. That got me thinking.

Every night John puts drops into his eye and said doing this religiously is very important.

Vision from loss of glaucoma is irreversible therefore glaucoma needs to be treated to prevent potential loss of vision before symptoms develop. Glaucoma treatment is aimed at lower the pressure in the eye. This will not restore lost vision; only halt progression and preserve the sight that remains.

A sportsman for most of his life, eyesight is very important to John and he said the specialist he goes to is very helpful.

“I’m getting a lot of help from the optometrists and things. They’re keen to make sure you keep going.”

John captained the New Zealand Cricket team for 34 test matches between 1956 and 1965, became an International Cricket Council match referee and was awarded an OBE in 1962. He is writing his fourth book.

Glaucoma NZ urges everyone to have an eye examination for glaucoma by the age of 45, every five years after that until the age of 60, and three yearly after 60.

If everyone did this, most glaucoma would be detected early, treatment commenced and the rate of blindness would drop dramatically.