Hypertension and Diabetes Can Increase Common Eye Disease Risk

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Many people would agree that sight is one of the most important senses people have. Now scientists have moved closer to learning the cause of a type of blood clot in the eye that causes reduced vision and also learned that people with this illness typically have an escalated risk of hypertension, diabetes and other serious conditions, according to recent study findings published in the British Medical Journal and reported by Science Daily.

The disease that can create such problems is called branch retinal vein occlusion, a blockage of the blood vessels that channel blood from the retina. The retina is the layer of cells in the back of the eyes that's responsible for detecting light and allows people to see.

For the study, a team of Danish researchers reviewed photos that diagnosed branch retinal vein occlusion in 1,168 patients. Scientists also confirmed other diseases the participants suffered using the Danish national registries and researchers compared the data to that of 116,800 healthy people. Next, researchers compared illness and mortality statistics of Danish patients with a blood clot in the retina's main blood vessels before and after the retinal blood clot occurred.

Scientists found that while the patients with branch retinal vein occlusion showed a higher frequency of plaque buildup (arterial disease) in the heart and brain, the same patients did not show an increased frequency of venous disease, disorders caused by sluggish blood flow through weak and damaged veins.

Because of this new information, scientists suggested that disease prevention and treatment of patients with this eye disease should also focus on hypertension, diabetes and atherosclerosis (plaque buildup in the arteries).

"Our new results indicate that branch retinal vein occlusion is caused by thickening of the arterial wall," said Mette Bertelsen, a University of Copenhagen PhD student and lead study author. "This makes it crucial for doctors to treat patients diagnosed with the disease with medicine to lower blood pressure in order to prevent blood clots from forming in the heart and brain."

What's more, branch retinal vein occlusion is often a sign of increased risk of blood clots in other

parts of the body, Bertelsen added.

Worldwide, more than 14 million have the disease.

Glaucoma is another common eye condition. Click here to read more.

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