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GOOD WORK: Optometrist Paul Stockman diagnosed Te Puke's Clare Clarke's early stage glaucoma.

Simple test saves eyesight

Te Puke home care support worker Clare Clarke considers herself "lucky" to have been diagnosed early with the eye condition glaucoma.

"My son's teacher at his daycare was concerned he might be colour blind, so suggested I bring him to free screening at Visique Te Puke Optometrists.

"Eye sight problems run in my family. My great-grandfather went blind at 43 and my mother has impaired vision from glaucoma.

"I was always aware of that family history and while living in the UK, I had regular eye checks. But since returning to New Zealand in 2007, I hadn't had any checks."

So Mrs Clarke, 44, took the chance when she was in the optometrist's room with son Stephen to have her own eyes checked.

Visique Te Puke Optometrists' Paul Stockman said Clare's loss of vision wasn't immediately obvious.

When he checked the pressure in her eyes and her field of sight it became obvious she needed immediate attention.

She was sent to Park St Eye Clinic in Tauranga for specialist attention.

Mr Stockman has been an optometrist for 20 years and said Clare's case was one of the most dramatic cases of glaucoma he had seen in New Zealand.

"Clare is very young to present with

“It is not a rare condition, and is becoming more common as people live longer.”

PAUL STOCKMAN
Optometrist

such sight loss. Normally we expect glaucoma to show up in people over 60.

"However, it is a treatable disease. We cannot restore vision that has been lost to glaucoma but we can usually stop it deteriorating, in most cases with a simple regime of eye drops.

"That is why it is important for anyone who may experience anything unusual with their eyesight, and especially if there is a family history, to have a test to screen for glaucoma. Of course they may have another type of sight problem but an early diagnosis generally helps with any treatment plan," said Mr Stockman.

In most cases the treatment is eye drops every day for the rest of a person's life. But other treatments which may be required are surgery or a combination of methods.

Mrs Clarke applies two different types of eye drops to her eyes, morning and night.

She is "just grateful" that the problem was picked up now.

She has already lost the "sky" part of her vision but that is no hindrance to her holding a driver's licence.

"I was annoyed initially, but that passed. It was mainly because it meant I had to remember to use the drops twice a day. In the mornings I was busy getting kids to school and myself to work and at night I'd be tired and it was a hassle.

"But, hey, if it's going to save my sight I'm certainly going to make a point of putting those drops in. I keep the bottles on top of the television set where I see them first and last thing during the day," she said.

The number of Kiwis with glaucoma can be as high as four percent of the population, depending on what figures you read, said Mr Stockman.

"It is not a rare condition, and is becoming more common as people live longer."

One good way to ensure you don't have glaucoma is to take advantage of a free screening test during July which is glaucoma awareness month throughout New Zealand.

Phone Visique to make an appointment for the free screening. It doesn't take long and the optometrist will refer you to a specialist if you need closer attention.