



Optic Neuritis In Multiple Sclerosis

JUDY BOONE

I remember it was on a Friday morning, woke up and reached over to cutoff my alarm just like I normally do every morning on my phone. I noticed that I didn't see the phone. I didn't see the light. So then I turned my head and, um, I was able to see it. And when I put my hand over my left eye I realized that I couldn't see a thing out of my right eye.

MICHELLE WITHERSPOON

I was at my job, and the computer screens were all starting to get really fuzzy. I was like, "something is going on with all the computer screens. Get the IT people up here immediately." but within hours, literally hours, I started to lose my all my vision on my peripheral vision. Then it was these, like, huge shadows, like, these black shadows that were coming in. It was, like, my vision was almost, like, closing in on me, where I was looking, like, through a tunnel. By the next morning, when I went to see the doctor as an emergency, I had lost, um, probably about 90% of my eyesight.

JUDY BOONE

I went to see a neuro-ophthalmologist at that time. He looked at all the test results, and he, um, he did his own eye exams. And he said, he was sure that I optic neuritis.

TARIQ BHATTI, MD

It's been stated about 80 percent of patients with MS, at some point, in their life, will have some sort of vision problems. Uh, the most common being optic neuritis.

The optic nerve is the brain and as a result, it's very often affected 20 percent of patients with MS, they will tell you that their first symptom of MS was actually optic neuritis. So, optic neuritis is defined as inflammation of the optic nerve patients with optic neuritis have pain when they move their eye and then they also notice a decrease in their vision. In particular, patients with optic neuritis usually lose their vision quite suddenly. And in some people, they'll complain of blurred vision. But a lot of patients will notice that colors are not as bright in that eye that has the optic neuritis versus the other eye.

What the ophthalmologist is gonna do is check the vision, look at the front of the eye with an instrument called the slit lamp and then dilate the pupils and look in the back of the eye. They will also may do some other testing as well, checking your peripheral vision, checking your color vision, uh, and also sometimes we'll do ultrasound, uh, uh, testing, called optical coherence tomography or OCT to get an idea of what the back of the eye looks like. So, the exam can be pretty, uh, extensive. And, uh, based on both the history, the examination, you can make the clinical diagnosis of optic neuritis.

JUDY BOONE

My blindness in my right eye lasted about 2 weeks. Exactly one month later the same thing happened with my left side. I was told that I had it in that eye too. And it took a little bit longer for my vision to come back in the left eye. I would say a few months, um, even though it wasn't complete blindness in there, but almost complete blindness.

TARIQ BHATTI, MD

If you've had a bout of optic neuritis in one eye, there is a chance it can occur in the, the same eye or in the fellow eye, meaning the opposite eye. It's very uncommon for patients with multiple sclerosis to have an involvement of both eyes simultaneously.

MICHELLE WITHERSPOON

Most of the time I immediately lose my peripheral vision. Um, and then, it's, starts to close in, like a big fog. So I always immediately call the neurologist and get on some type of steroid. I've gone through a couple of different treatments for my vision. Um, obviously, the typical steroids. Um, they've prescribed eye patches or things you put

over your eyes. I've chosen, for me, personally, not to do that. I'd just rather close my eyes and go to sleep, uh, and try to make it work.

TARIQ BHATTI, MD

It can take several weeks to several months to sometimes even up to a year for their vision to resolve. For some people, who want to regain their vision back quickly, or they have significant vision loss, you can give them three days of, of intravenous steroids followed usually by an oral prednisone taper. In the optic neuritis treatment trial, the ONTT trial which looked at patients with optic neuritis and they were treated with, with either oral prednisone, iv steroids, which is basically prednisone in an IV form and placebo, what we found was that those patients who received the low dose of oral prednisone their risk of having another bout of optic neuritis was doubled. The bottom line is that most patients who have optic neuritis will recover vision very well. And if you want your vision to recover quicker, you take steroids but that doesn't mean that your vision is gonna be any better if you receive steroids versus nothing.

MICHELLE WITHERSPOON

Every time my, um, eyesight has been impacted, I lose a little bit of vision each time. The last time I've lost more than regular. That's the scariest thing, because you think about what, what will it be in 20 years? You know, what will my vision look like? Will I still have it? As you get older, your eyes just go through other changes anyway, right? So we always are testing. "Is there something going on with my, my optic nerve or is there something else going on in my eyes?"

Losing your eyesight, I think, out of all the symptoms I've had with MS, has been the most emotional thing I've had to deal with. And I think it's because it impacts so many other areas of my life. Losing my eyesight impacts my ability to work.

TARIQ BHATTI, MD

Only three percent of patients ended up legally blind from their bout of optic neuritis. But unfortunately, for those who end up with poor vision, that's very challenging and we, people have tried a whole host of medications. So when you have a person who is, who has lost their vision from optic neuritis after many, many years, we usually send

them to our low vision specialists. And optometrists or ophthalmologists and what they usually do is work with the patient in terms of finding either magnifiers or they use close circuit TVs. I mean, there's a lot of new technology out there now with the IPAD and, and other digital, uh, devices that can actually improve the person's quality of life by allowing them to be able to read or do many of the daily activities.

For those who have lost their vision in both eyes, then really a low vision specialist is, is the person to see, to see if they can improve your vision and, uh, they improve your vision in terms of magnifying your vision

One thing that patients may experience after they recover from a bout of optic neuritis is that if they take a hot shower or if they exercise, they'll notice a transient blurring of the vision and that's actually called Uhthoff's Phenomenon where after you've recovered from a bout of optic neuritis, when your body temperature goes up, there's a decrease in conduction of the signal from your eye to your brain and as a result, you get a transient blurring of your vision.

JUDY BOONE

If I get too hot, uh, my vision gets really blurry. Um, sometimes I have a lot of eye pain, if I get really tired. If I get stressed, my vision gets blurry. I feel like a film is over my eyes. And since I work in front of a computer all day, I have to, um, take, you know, breaks. Usually if I just take a break, um, from whatever is going on, if I just lay down or just sit down and rest, get cool, um, normally my, you know, the blurriness and eye pain it will go away.

TARIQ BHATTI, MD

In my experience, some patients get very, uh, nervous, uh, and get concerned that they're having another bout of optic neuritis but once the patient cools off, they come out of the shower or if they stop exercising, they drink some cold water, the vision does return back to normal. You don't have, there's no permanent damage done and it's a phenomenon that may be recurrent, that may occur for many years down the road, but again, it's a benign condition.

JUDY BOONE

I'm not able to go to a lot of my boys football games in the dead of summer, because it's just too hot. Sometimes I'm not able to go outside and play with them if it's really hot. I have to wait 'till it's cooler in the year. That's been, you know, one of the things that I hate that I can't do with my boys.

TARIQ BHATTI, MD

I think it's really important for people with MS to understand that vision is a major component of the disease and that, uh, if they have a bout of optic neuritis, or what they feel is a bout of optic neuritis, or they're having double vision or if they're having things moving, they should seek medical care.