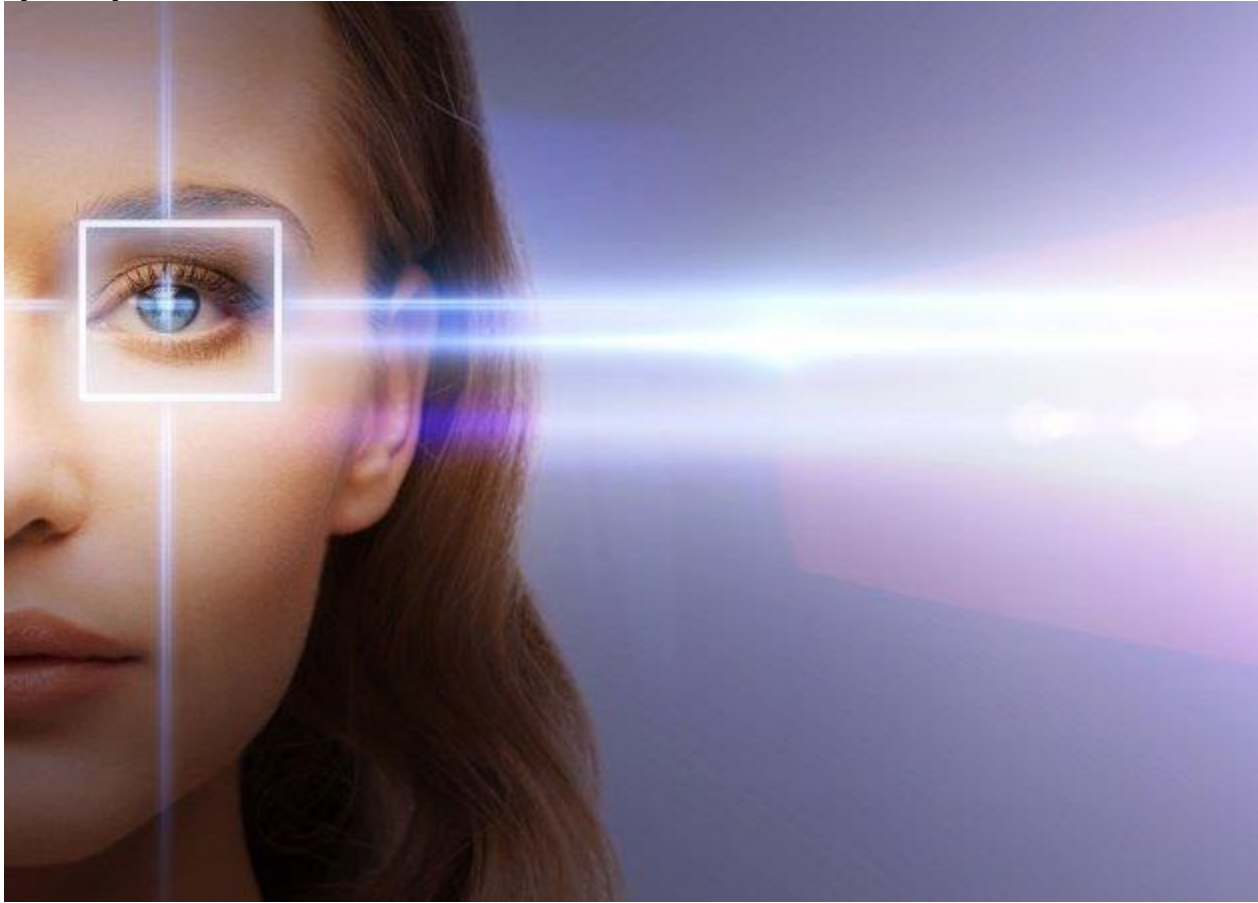


Eye on Lyme Disease

Visual Symptoms and Effects Often Overlooked

by Randy Schulman



Lyme disease is a very prevalent health concern across the United States and particularly in our neck of the woods. Without prompt treatment, the Lyme spirochetes spread throughout the body through the bloodstream, affecting the joints, heart, brain and eyes. Individuals may experience a wide range of symptoms, including headaches, joint pain, muscle pain, back and neck stiffness, facial paralysis, blurred or double vision, and ringing in the ears. Other symptoms can include chest pains, palpitations, tremors, chronic fatigue, numbness, dizziness, burning sensations, mood swings, irritability, sleep disturbances, mental instability, panic attacks, speech difficulties, disorientation, confusion and memory loss.

There are some challenges to the LD diagnosis. Even when LD is suspected, blood tests are inaccurate and miss specific markers for the disease. In addition, LD often comes with co-infections that make diagnosis and treatment trickier. Understanding that LD and its co-infections can have effects throughout the body can make a key difference in getting the right

answers to move forward with treatment. Seemingly unrelated symptoms can be pieced together to come up with a better understanding of what is happening in the body.

For example, certain vision conditions accompany LD and co-infections. People are becoming much more aware of vision involvement and its effects. Vision concerns can be as mild as light sensitivity to the serious Bell's palsy. This palsy, a common nerve-related problem, is a drooping of the muscles on one side of the face; it leaves the person with the inability to blink or close their eye, drying the cornea and endangering sight.

Being aware of the diverse symptoms that accompany LD and its co-infections, including the visual conditions, can help to connect the dots on this disease and get the appropriate treatment needed. Typical treatment is a course of antibiotics. Naturopathic and integrative practitioners recognize that LD and its co-infections must be viewed as part of a larger picture and addressed at the immune-function level. Supporting the immune system and the body's natural way of fighting infection is an important part of the treatment process as well as addressing the subsequent effects throughout the body. The vision concerns can be addressed and alleviated concurrent to the overall health of the body.

The most common vision symptoms include:

- light sensitivity that requires sunglasses on a cloudy day and prevents night driving;
- flashes, floaters and phantom images with dots, lines or streaks that range in color and are seen out of the corner of the eye;
- cloudy or "foggy" vision where objects go in and out of focus;
- faulty depth perception resulting in poor judgment of space and a feeling of instability;
- double vision where there is a "ghosting" of another image or a print becomes double; and
- reading confusion consisting of difficulty focusing on words, words jumping, and an inability to recall what has been read.

Eye involvement seems to be related to the stage of the disease. In the early stages, many people develop conjunctivitis or pink eye. The eyes are red, uncomfortable and discharge pus. Typically contagious, in this LD-related form, the pink eye is not and usually resolves on its own. Keratitis, an inflammation of the cornea, is also seen in early stages of LD and can cause pain in the eye, light sensitivity, tearing and blurred vision. The eye may appear opacified, or covered with a white haze. Prednisone, a steroid, may be given as eye drops, or by mouth for up to six months.

Later stages result in more serious inflammation of the eye including uveitis (inflammation of the uvea), pars planitis (inflammation of the midsection of the eye) and optic neuritis (inflammation of the optic nerve). Symptoms of eye inflammation include significant photophobia or light sensitivity, flashes and floaters, or lights and spots seen in front of the eyes. More concerning inflammatory symptoms are a loss of color vision and/or vision loss as seen in retinal vasculitis

(an inflammation of the blood vessels of the retina) or papillitis (inflammation of the optic nerve).

The main treatment used for uveitis is steroid eye drops, which reduce inflammation. Treatment can take several months as steroids need to be slowly reduced or a rebound effect will occur. Drops that dilate the pupil may also be used to keep the iris from sticking to the lens, which can happen if the iris becomes scarred and can cause permanent vision loss. Steroids are typically given both intravenously and as eye drops and/or intraocular injections to treat the more serious retinal vasculitis and optic nerve neuritis.

In addition to specific, more allopathic methods of treatment for such conditions as keratitis and uveitis, there are natural methods for supporting the health of the eyes and combating some of the more frustrating symptoms of blurred vision, double vision and light sensitivity. Syntonic light therapy, nutritional support and lenses and/or prisms can help treat and alleviate vision symptoms associated with LD.

Consulting with an optometrist or ophthalmologist is important if any concerning visual symptoms are occurring.

More information about doctors who are able to treat the visual conditions accompanying LD with minimal medication can be found at COVD.org, OEPPF.org and CollegeofSyntonicOptometry.org.

Randy Schulman, MS, OD, FCOVD, specializes in behavioral optometry and vision therapy, pediatrics, learning disabilities, and preventative and integrative vision care for all ages. EyeCare Associates has locations in Trumbull, Southport and Norwalk. Connect at CTEyeCareAssociates.com. See ad, page 33.