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Device Could Open Walls Of Tunnel Vision

Researchers Testing Glasses-Like Device

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BOSTON -- A new device is broadening the visual horizons for people who have tunnel vision.

NewsCenter 5's Heather Unruh reported that most people who have tunnel vision have to move their heads back and forth to see what those with normal vision see in one glance.

"I could be talking to someone in a room, they might move a little and leave, and I might still be talking to them and don't know they've gone," said Henry Apfelbaum, who has tunnel vision.

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Apfelbaum, who has had tunnel vision for more than 20 years, is part of a study that is testing a new tool. High-tech eyeglasses combine a tiny, mounted camera connected to a palm-size computer that is kept in the user's pocket. A tiny chip is placed on one of the eyeglass lenses.

"What we've tried to do is to somehow provide both the larger field of view while maintaining the sharp vision," said Dr. Eli Peli, of the Schepens Eye Research Institute. "The image from the camera goes into the tiny computer, which makes a cartoon of the video out of it, so you just see the outline."

The outline provides a guide of what is around them so they can avoid tripping or bumping into obstacles.

A recent study where users successfully pointed out a letter on a screen showed that the device works.

During a virtual walk-through at a mall, researchers tested whether patients can see if they are likely to collide with a person who pops up on the screen.

Researchers hope the tool will be life-changing for those with the condition.

"Many of these patients change their lifestyle where they go nowhere. It's particularly difficult in New England with the weather creating more obstacles and darkness comma which many of these patients have problems with," said Peli.

Apfelbaum admitted the device does take some training, but said it helps him get out more.

"I've worn them to go over to the North End. You see sidewalks, steps, so it definitely makes a big difference," he said.

The glasses are still in the development stage, although Peli said they should sell for under \$1,000. Local company MicroOptical in Westwood is helping with the design.

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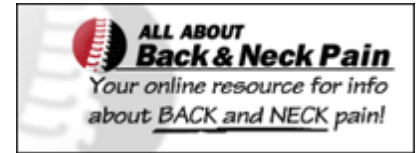
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