

Glaucoma Awareness

Tips to Help Keep Your Health On Track!

Glaucoma is the second leading cause of blindness in the U.S. and the third leading cause worldwide. It affects more than 3 million people in the U.S. alone. Glaucoma is called “the sneak thief of sight” because usually no symptoms are apparent and once the vision is gone, the loss is permanent. A person with undiagnosed glaucoma can lose up to 40% of their vision without even realizing it. ⁽¹⁾

What is glaucoma?

Glaucoma is categorized as an eye disease that gradually takes an individual's eye sight without warning. While it can affect people of any age, the most common form of glaucoma mainly affects middle-aged and elderly people. For most glaucoma patients, damage to the optic nerve is what causes the loss of vision. The optic nerve acts similar to an electric cable, containing over a million wires, and is responsible for transporting images from the eye to the brain. Unfortunately, there is currently no cure for glaucoma but medication and/or surgery can slow down or prevent further loss of vision. ⁽¹⁾

What are the types of glaucoma?

There are two main types of glaucoma:

- **Primary Open-Angle Glaucoma (POAG)** – This is the most common form of glaucoma and is the result of optic nerve damage which progresses over time. A loss of optic nerve fibers is typical and, generally, there is no pain associated with the increase in eye pressure. The loss in vision usually begins with peripheral or side vision; without being aware, an individual starts turning their head to the side to compensate. ⁽¹⁾
- **Angle-Closure Glaucoma** – Less than 10% of the glaucoma cases in the U.S. are due to this type which is caused by a sudden increase in pressure inside the eye and the results are very serious. Immediate treatment is necessary to prevent optic nerve damage or vision loss. ⁽¹⁾

What are the symptoms of glaucoma?

Most individuals with glaucoma have no symptoms and it is only discovered once a significant amount of vision loss has occurred. There are, however, a few things we should all pay close attention to and have checked out by an eye physician should any of these occur: ⁽¹⁾

- Any loss of vision
- Unexplained eye pain
- Unusual or unexpected eye redness
- Haloes
- Blurred vision

What are the risk factors associated with glaucoma?

Glaucoma can affect anyone; however, certain individuals are at a greater risk than others for developing it. ⁽¹⁾

- People with a family history of glaucoma
- People middle-aged and the elderly
- People with diabetes
- People of certain ethnic groups
- People with uncontrolled high blood pressure
- People who are severely nearsighted or farsighted
- People with high blood pressure

What can I expect if I am tested for glaucoma?

During an eye examination to rule-out glaucoma, the following is what you can usually expect your eye physician to perform: ⁽¹⁾

- Your central vision will be checked using an eye chart.
- The front of your eyes will be checked using a special microscope called a slit lamp.
- The pressure inside the eyes is checked with an instrument called a tonometer.
- The optic nerves are examined for any damage
- Your pupils may be dilated to ensure that the optic nerves have been thoroughly examined.
- Your peripheral vision may be checked using an automated visual field machine.

When to contact your doctor?

Due to the lack of symptoms associated with glaucoma, regular annual eye examinations are extremely important. However, if you suspect you may have glaucoma or you are at high risk, contact your eye physician immediately. It is important to understand that if you already have one eye with glaucoma, the other eye is at an increased risk of future damage. ⁽¹⁾

⁽¹⁾ www.emedicinehealth.com

This information is intended as informational only; not as a replacement for the medical advice of your physician.