

GLAUCOMA

WHAT IS GLAUCOMA?

Glaucoma is a group of eye disorders that cause gradual damage to the optic nerve. Your optic nerve consists of more than 1 million nerve fibers that send images from the eye to the brain, making it vital to overall vision health.

Primary open angle glaucoma is the most common form of this disease and is associated with increased eye pressure, which can slowly damage the optic nerve. This pressure results from excessive fluid build-up in the front of the eye. A clear liquid continuously flows in and out of a space called the anterior chamber to nourish nearby tissues. When the drainage system is not working properly, fluid cannot leave the eye and as it builds up, so does eye pressure.



It is important to note that glaucoma is not always associated with elevated eye pressure. Damage to the optic nerve (and vision) can occur in the presence of normal eye pressure as well. This is called normal tension glaucoma and it is treated similarly to open angle glaucoma. With no symptoms that develop in this case, scheduling your annual eye health exam is essential in making sure you maintain healthy vision.

HOW IS GLAUCOMA DIAGNOSED?



Glaucoma is diagnosed during a comprehensive eye exam, which consists of a variety of tests and checkups including:

- Dilated eye exam
- Visual acuity test
- Visual field test
- Tonometry
- Pachymetry

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF GLAUCOMA?



Damage to the optic nerve can be so gradual that symptoms go unnoticed. Be wary of any loss to peripheral vision which can mean that the condition is worsening.

If glaucoma is left untreated, serious vision loss may occur. After peripheral vision diminishes, the loss of frontal vision may occur until none remains.

CAN GLAUCOMA BE PREVENTED & TREATED?

Many factors beyond your control may increase your risk of getting glaucoma such as age, race and family history, although you can lower your risk by maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Minimize your chances of being diagnosed with glaucoma by controlling your blood pressure and weight through diet and exercise in addition to scheduling an annual eye exam.

Several medications, including eye drops and pills treat glaucoma by reducing pressure in the eye. If the medicine does not sufficiently lower pressure, surgery may be the answer.



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If you have any questions or concerns regarding these symptoms, please consult your optometrist immediately.

Sources: American Optometric Association, National Eye Institute, Prevent Blindness America, Mayo Clinic, Prevention, HealthDay News

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