

January

Glaucoma Awareness Month

Understanding glaucoma's symptoms, causes, and treatments



What is glaucoma?

Glaucoma is a disease that damages the optic nerve in your eye. Normally, the optic nerve carries information from the eye to the brain, allowing you to see clearly. Glaucoma occurs when fluid builds up in your eye, increasing the eye's pressure. This increase in pressure slowly damages the millions of fibers that make up the optic nerve.

There are two major types of glaucoma: primary open-angle glaucoma and angle-closure glaucoma:

- **Primary open-angle**—Happens gradually as the eye does not drain fluid as well as it should, leading to pressure buildup and optic nerve damage.
- **Angle-closure**—Happens when the iris is close to the drainage angle, or the area of the eye that drains fluids, and blocks the fluid from draining.

What are symptoms of glaucoma?

In most cases, people with glaucoma suffer no symptoms until irreversible damage has already been to the optic nerve and vision loss takes place. As the disease develops, blind spots begin to appear in the peripheral (side) vision, causing an effect similar to tunnel vision.

Sources: All About Vision, AAO, AOA, Glaucoma.org, NIH.gov

What causes glaucoma?

When fluid cannot drain properly from the eye, the unregulated pressure begins to build up. As the pressure damages the small fibers in the optic nerve, your vision worsens. Once all of the fibers are gone, you will become blind. Important risk factors for glaucoma include age, race, genetics, and medical conditions.

How do you treat glaucoma?

Glaucoma causes permanent damage. However, certain measures can be taken to slow the progression of the disease and prevent further damage. Glaucoma is usually treated using daily eye drops that either decrease eye pressure or reduce the amount of fluid in the eye. Another form of treatment includes a surgical procedure called a trabeculectomy.



Regular eye exams are important

Eye exams aren't just for correcting vision issues. They are also key in the early detection of systemic diseases like diabetes and hypertension. Your eye exam is one of the most important preventative care services available to you.

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