

Vision Care: Glaucoma

Glaucoma leads to blindness by damaging the optic nerve. Elevated pressure in the eye is a risk factor, but even people with normal pressure can lose vision to glaucoma.

Glaucoma is a group of eye diseases that gradually steal sight without warning. Vision loss is caused by damage to the optic nerve. This nerve acts like an electric cable with over a million wires. It is responsible for carrying images from the eye to the brain.

Adult glaucoma falls into two categories—open angle and closed angle. This is marked by an increase of intraocular pressure (IOP), or pressure inside the eye. When optic nerve damage occurs despite normal IOP, it is called normal tension glaucoma. Secondary glaucoma refers to any case in which another disease causes or contributes to increased eye pressure, resulting in optic nerve damage and vision loss.

Signs and Symptoms

In the early stages of the disease, there may be no symptoms. Glaucoma is painless, and patients do not realize they are losing their vision until the later stages, when the damage is irreversible. When symptoms do appear, usually after the disease has progressed, they are in the form of:

- Loss of side (peripheral) vision
- Difficulty focusing on close-up words
- Seeing colored rings or halos around lights
- Headaches and eye pain
- Frequent changes of corrective lens prescriptions
- Difficulty adjusting eyes to the dark

Did You Know...?

While over 2.2 million Americans are estimated to have glaucoma, less than half of those individuals know they have it.

Risk Factors

Anyone can get glaucoma, but some people have a greater risk of developing the condition, including:

- People over age 40 who have not had regular eye exams
- Anyone over the age of 60
- People with family histories of glaucoma
- Those with abnormally high intraocular pressure
- People of African descent, especially those over the age of 40
- Diabetics
- Those with myopia (nearsightedness)
- People who have undergone long-term steroid or cortisone use
- People with previous eye injuries

Prevention and Treatment

There is no cure for glaucoma yet. However, medication or surgery can slow or prevent continued vision loss. The appropriate treatment depends upon the type of glaucoma as well as other factors. Early detection is vital to stopping the progression of the disease. Be sure to get regular eye exams (every two years until age 60, and annually from age 60 on).

Do you have questions about glaucoma? Have you or a family member recently been diagnosed? Contact **Health Advocate™** to learn more and connect with a Personal Health Advocate™. Call **1-877-325-7265, Option 2** or email answers@healthadvocate.com.