



TO YOUR HEALTH

WELCOA'S ONLINE GENERAL WELLNESS BULLETIN

Gaining Clear Sight on Glaucoma

According to the World Health Organization, glaucoma is the second leading cause of blindness around the world. Glaucoma is an eye disease that can damage your optic nerve, which supplies visual information to your brain from your eyes. Glaucoma is usually, but not always, the result of abnormally high pressure inside your eye. Over time, the increased pressure can erode your optic nerve tissue, which may lead to vision loss or even blindness. However, if it's caught early, you may be able to prevent additional vision loss, so it's important to understand how to spot and treat this disease.

DIAGNOSING GLAUCOMA

There are five kinds of glaucoma. The most common type of glaucoma is primary open-angle glaucoma. It has no signs or symptoms except gradual vision loss. For that reason, it's important that you go to yearly comprehensive eye exams so your ophthalmologist, or eye specialist, can monitor any changes in your vision.

To diagnose glaucoma, your ophthalmologist will want to perform a comprehensive eye examination. They'll check for signs of deterioration, including loss of nerve tissue. Your doctor will want to know what symptoms you've been experiencing and if you have any personal or family history of glaucoma. They'll also ask for a general health assessment to determine if any other health conditions may be impacting your eye health, such as diabetes or high blood pressure.



Talk with your doctor if you have any concerns about your health.

ARE YOU AT RISK?

Most risk factors for glaucoma are out of your control. The following can place you at greater odds of developing the disease:

- » **Age:** People over 60 are at increased risk of glaucoma, and the risk increases slightly with each year of age.
- » **Ethnicity:** African Americans or people of African descent are significantly more likely to develop glaucoma than Caucasians. People of Asian descent are at a higher risk of angle-closure glaucoma, and people of Japanese descent have a higher risk of developing low-tension glaucoma.
- » **Prior eye problems:** Chronic eye inflammation and thin corneas can lead to increased pressure in your eyes. Physical injury or trauma to your eye can also cause your eye pressure to increase.

- » **Family history:** Some types of glaucoma may run in families. If your parent or grandparent had open-angle glaucoma, you're at an increased risk of developing the condition.
- » **Having certain chronic conditions:** People with diabetes and those with high blood pressure and heart disease have an increased risk of developing glaucoma.

HOW IS GLAUCOMA TREATED?

The goal of glaucoma treatment is to reduce intraocular pressure (IOP) to stop any additional eyesight loss. Typically, your doctor will begin treatment with prescription eye drops. If these don't work or more advanced treatment is needed, your doctor may suggest additional treatments.

If a blocked or slow channel is causing increased IOP, your doctor may suggest surgery to make a drainage path for fluid or destroy tissues that are responsible for the increased fluid.

Glaucoma can't be prevented, but it's still important to catch it early so you can begin treatment that will help prevent it from getting worse. The best way to catch any type of glaucoma early is to have an annual preventive eye care appointment. Make an appointment with an ophthalmologist. Simple tests performed during these routine eye checks may be able to detect damage from glaucoma before it advances and begins causing vision loss.

