
What Is Glaucoma?

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Glaucoma

Glaucoma is a group of diseases that damage the eye's optic nerve and can cause vision loss and blindness. The most common form of glaucoma is open-angle glaucoma. As with most eye issues, early detection and proper treatment can lessen the damage caused by glaucoma and protect your eyes against serious vision loss.

The eye surgeons at Penn Highlands Eye Center treat thousands of glaucoma patients each year and are highly skilled at the laser and conventional surgeries used to combat the effects of the disease.

HOW GLAUCOMA DAMAGES VISION

Open-angle glaucoma occurs as a result of damage to the optic nerve at the back of the eye. In most cases, this is caused by an increased pressure inside the eye, usually due to poor drainage of the fluid inside the eye. This puts pressure on the nerve that sends signals to the brain for processing. In some cases, the damage is due to poor blood supply to the optic nerve, and in these cases the eye pressure may not be high, although lowering eye pressure is still the main form of treatment. Another risk factor for the optic nerve is uncontrolled blood pressure.

SYMPTOMS OF GLAUCOMA

In the beginning stages of glaucoma, vision is normal and there are no symptoms or pain. However, as the disease progresses, a person may experience a loss of side or peripheral vision or have tunnel vision. If left undiagnosed and untreated, a complete loss of vision will occur.

Symptoms that become apparent as the disease progresses include:

- Blurred vision
- Noticeable loss of peripheral vision
- Difficulty adjusting to low light conditions

If you don't have any of the above symptoms, there are a few indicators that you might be at risk:

- A family history of glaucoma
- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- Suffer from migraines, heart attacks, strokes or Raynauds disease
- Short sightedness
- Suffered an eye injury
- Use, or have used steroids for asthma, joint disease, eczema, etc.

If you're in this high-risk group, you must have an eye check before age 35, with regular checks after that.

EARLY DETECTION

Early treatment for glaucoma can delay further progression of the disease. That's why early detection is so important. So if there are no symptoms to detect glaucoma before it starts damaging your vision, what's the answer? The only sure way to avoid this disease sneaking up on you is to have regular check-ups by your optometrist or ophthalmologist – one who has the equipment to perform a comprehensive examination that can detect whether there's any sign of glaucoma.

HOW TO TREAT

The most common treatment is with eye drops to help lower eye pressure, although laser treatment and surgery can sometimes be required. Again, the best way to prevent it becoming a problem is early detection. While it can be treated, there's currently no way to restore vision that's been lost.
