

Glaucoma is one of the leading causes of blindness. It affects every one out of 50 adults. The risk of developing the disease increases after the age of 35. However, glaucoma can occur at any age. It is more commonly linked to patients that are diabetic, African-American, nearsighted and those that have a family history of the disease. The symptoms are slight, making it easy to go undiagnosed until permanent damage occurs. However, early diagnosis can prevent visual damage from glaucoma.

What is Glaucoma?

Glaucoma is usually caused by an overproduction of fluid in the eye. When the drainage system within the eye becomes blocked, the pressure in the eye increases. High pressure in the eye causes damage to the optic nerve, which can result in permanent vision loss.

Electrical impulses are carried to the brain by the optic nerve, producing your sense of sight. Glaucoma damages the optic nerve in the eye. Damage done to this nerve results in permanent blind spots within the field of vision.

What are the Symptoms?

The earliest symptoms of glaucoma usually go unnoticed. The build up of pressure is gradual, so there is virtually

no discomfort or pain. Until substantial vision loss has occurred, most do not detect a change. Peripheral vision is the first to be affected, followed by the central vision. Later in the course of the disease, mild headaches and difficulty with night vision occur.

Sometimes the symptoms are more noticeable. The patient may experience blurred vision, pain, halos around lights and/or nausea. In either case, however, if the disease is left untreated, total blindness will result.

How is Glaucoma Diagnosed and Treated?

The evaluation consists of checking the pressure within the eye, and monitoring the drainage channels for proper flow. The optic nerve is checked for damage, as well. Visual field tests can be given to determine the extent of damage that has been done to the patient's peripheral vision.

Types of Glaucoma			
Type	Cause/Effect	Symptoms	Comments
Chronic Open Angle Glaucoma	Gradual blockage of drainage channel. Pressure builds slowly.	Gradual loss of side vision. Affects side vision first.	This type of glaucoma progresses very slowly and is a life long condition.
Acute Closed Angle Glaucoma	Total blockage of drainage channel. Sudden increase in pressure.	Nausea Blurred vision Severe pain Halos around lights	This is considered a medical emergency. Permanent blindness is a risk if not treated immediately.
Secondary Glaucoma	Injury, infection, tumors, drugs or inflammation cause scar tissue that blocks the drainage channel.	Gradual loss of side vision Affects side vision first	This form of glaucoma may progress slowly.
Congenital Glaucoma	Fluid drainage system is abnormal at birth.	Enlarged eyes Cloudy cornea Light sensitivity Excessive tearing	This condition needs to be treated immediately after birth to save vision.

If glaucoma is diagnosed early, it can always be controlled and treated. In most cases, it is detected during a routine eye examination. Glaucoma, however, cannot be cured. Once the vision has been lost, it cannot be restored. Eye drops, medication and laser treatments are all used to treat glaucoma. All of these methods serve to lower the pressure inside the eye in order to prevent damage to the optic nerve.

Prevention

All loss of vision from glaucoma constitutes permanent damage! If detected early, it can be treated before any lasting damage. Because of the nature of the symptoms, regular eye examinations by an ophthalmologist are important. Those that run a higher risk of having the disease and those over 35 years of age need to have added caution.

Any losses of vision peripherally or otherwise, should be evaluated immediately.

**As always, prevention
is the best medicine.**



Ernst Nicolitz, M.D. is a board certified ophthalmologist and fellowship trained in oculoplastics surgery. He is a published surgeon in cosmetic surgery and a leader in cataract and laser surgeries. The team at Nicolitz Eye Consultants includes two ophthalmologists, Drs. Chiel Wind and David Mills and two optometric physicians, Drs. Jennifer Henson and Louis Catania. Our team of physicians utilizes the latest in ophthalmic diagnostic equipment. Along with Dr. Nicolitz, the entire professional and support staff are available to serve your complete eye care needs.

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Glaucoma

How to Protect Your Vision

