

# Facts About Glaucoma



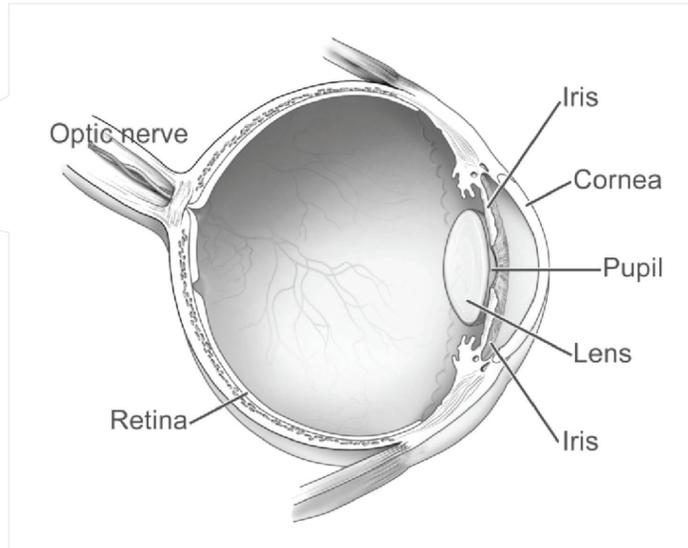
Early detection and treatment can protect your vision.

## What is glaucoma?

Glaucoma is a group of diseases that can damage the optic nerve in the eye. The optic nerve is the part of the eye that sends electrical impulses for sight to the brain. If left untreated, glaucoma can cause permanent vision loss or blindness.

## What causes glaucoma?

Clear fluid flows in and out of a small space at the front of the eye and keeps the tissues in the eye healthy. If this fluid drains too slowly, it puts pressure on the optic nerve and can cause glaucoma.



## What are the symptoms of glaucoma?

Often, there are no symptoms at first. Vision stays normal and there is no pain. But as the disease gets worse, side vision may begin to fail. Objects straight ahead may be clear, but objects to the side may not be seen. Over time, with no treatment, people with glaucoma may not be able to see objects straight ahead.

## Who is at higher risk for glaucoma?

Anyone can get glaucoma, but people at higher risk for glaucoma are:

- African Americans age 40 and older
- All adults age 60 and older, especially Hispanics/Latinos
- Those who have family members with glaucoma

Other factors that can increase the risk of glaucoma include:

- Diabetes
- Hypertension
- Previous eye injury

## How is glaucoma detected?

An eye care professional can determine whether a person has glaucoma through a comprehensive dilated eye exam. During this exam, drops are put into the eyes to enlarge the pupils. The eye care professional is then able to see more of the inside of the eye to check for signs of damage to the optic nerve. A dilated eye exam is important because screening for eye pressure alone is not enough to detect glaucoma.



## Medicare can help pay for part of a comprehensive dilated eye exam if a person:

- Has diabetes
- Has a family history of glaucoma
- Is an African American age 50 or older
- Is a Hispanic age 65 or older

For more information on this Medicare benefit, visit: [www.nei.nih.gov/Medicare](http://www.nei.nih.gov/Medicare).



## Does increased eye pressure mean that I have glaucoma?

Not necessarily. Increased eye pressure means you are at risk for glaucoma, but does not mean you have the disease. A person has glaucoma only if the optic nerve is damaged. If you have increased eye pressure but no damage to the optic nerve, you do not have glaucoma. However, you are at risk. Follow the advice of your eye care professional.

## How is glaucoma treated?

Glaucoma cannot be cured, but treatment can help control the pressure in your eye and delay further damage to the optic nerve. The most common treatments include:

- Medications, such as eye drops or pills
- Laser surgery
- Traditional surgery

Treatment usually begins with medication and, if needed, laser surgery. Traditional surgery is usually for patients whose eye pressure cannot be controlled with medication or laser surgery.

## How can I protect my vision?

Early detection and treatment are the best ways to control glaucoma before it causes permanent vision loss. If you are at higher risk for glaucoma, be sure to get a comprehensive dilated eye exam every one to two years.

To protect your vision from other risk factors, follow your doctor's instructions for managing diabetes and hypertension. And be sure to use protective eyewear in the workplace and during sports and recreational activities.

## For more information:

For more information, please contact the National Eye Institute (NEI) by email at [2020@nei.nih.gov](mailto:2020@nei.nih.gov) or visit [www.nei.nih.gov](http://www.nei.nih.gov).