

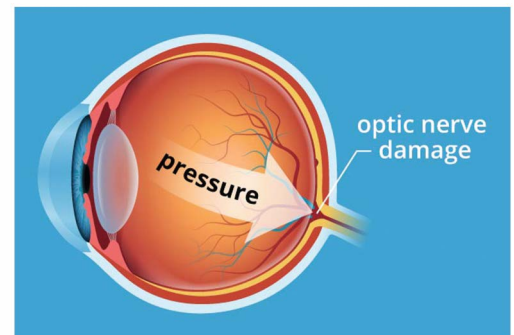
GLAUCOMA

INCREASED FLUID PRESSURE IN THE EYE CAUSING LOSS OF SIDE VISION

Glaucoma, one of the leading causes of blindness, is estimated to affect 1 of every 50 adults. Although glaucoma can occur at any age, the risk of developing the disease increases dramatically after the age of 35. Glaucoma is also more likely to develop in persons who are severely nearsighted, those with a family history of the condition, diabetics, Hispanics, and African Americans. Because the symptoms of early glaucoma are so slight, the disease often goes unnoticed until permanent vision loss has occurred. However, with early diagnosis and careful treatment, visual damage from glaucoma can be prevented.

WHAT IS GLAUCOMA?

Glaucoma is when the pressure of the eye is too high for the eye to withstand. The eye pressure causes damage to the optic nerve. Damage to the optic nerve causes gradual peripheral vision loss. If the entire nerve is destroyed, blindness will occur.



WHAT CAUSES GLAUCOMA?

Glaucoma is usually caused by an increase in the fluid pressure in the eye. The front part of the eye contains a clear, nourishing fluid called the aqueous which constantly circulates through the eye. Normally, this fluid leaves the eye through a drainage system and returns to the blood stream.

Glaucoma occurs from an overproduction of fluid or when the drainage system becomes blocked, causing fluid pressure to increase. The high pressure causes damage to the optic nerve, resulting in permanent vision loss. The exact reason the fluid system in the eye stops functioning properly is not completely understood. Much research is being done in this area to further our understanding of glaucoma.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF GLAUCOMA?



The early symptoms associated with chronic open angle glaucoma, the most common type, are usually unnoticeable. At first, in most cases, the building up pressure is gradual without any discomfort or pain. Most people do not detect a change in their vision until substantial sight loss has occurred. Certain parts of peripheral (side) vision are affected first with the top, sides, and bottom of the field of vision becoming decreased. Later in the course of the disease central vision becomes affected, mild headaches and difficulty with night vision might be experienced. If left untreated, total blindness will result.

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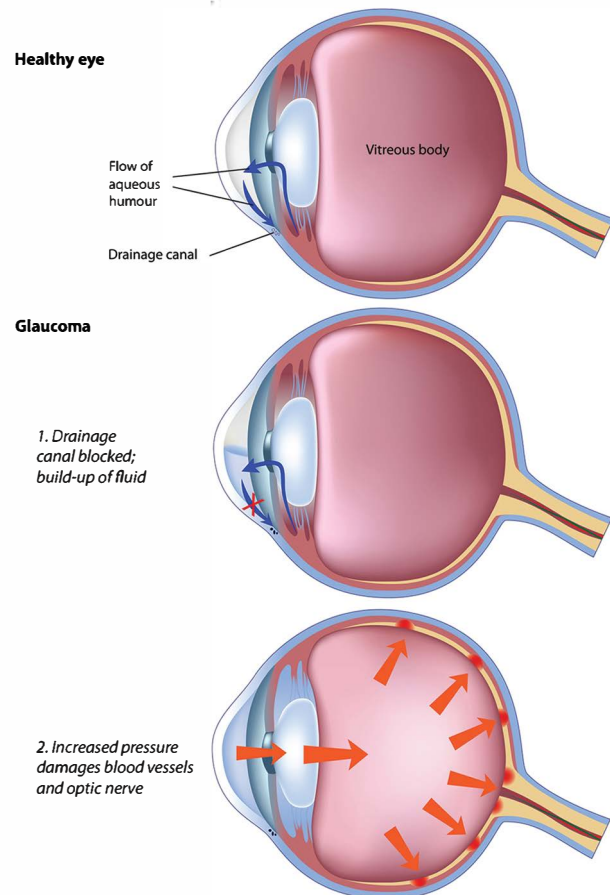
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HOW IS GLAUCOMA TREATED?

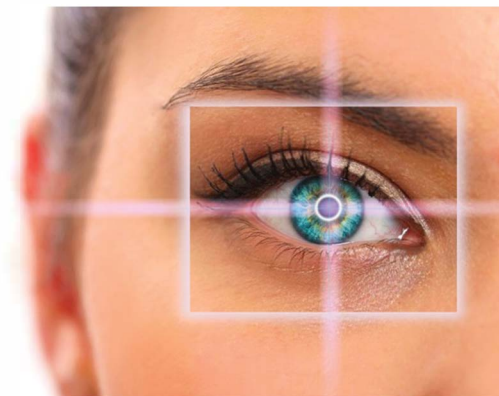
With early detection and treatment, glaucoma can almost always be controlled and vision preserved. However, glaucoma cannot be cured and once vision has been lost it cannot be restored. Treatment is concentrated on lowering the pressure inside the eye to prevent damage to the optic nerve.

The most common treatment for glaucoma is the use of medications in the form of eye drops. Some medications allow for faster drainage of fluid from the eye, while others reduce the production of fluid.

Treatment of glaucoma is usually a life-long process. Glaucoma management requires frequent monitoring and constant treatment. Since there is no way to determine if glaucoma is under control based on how a person feels or their vision, a person with glaucoma generally should be examined every 3 to 6 months for the rest of their lives.



PREVENTION IS THE BEST MEDICINE



Vision loss from glaucoma is permanent but can usually be prevented with early detection and treatment. Consequently, since the symptoms of the disease are often unnoticeable, regular eye examinations are important, especially for persons over the age of 35 or those in high risk groups.

If you have experienced a loss of peripheral vision or are having other difficulties with your vision, you should obtain a complete eye examination with one of our doctors at Coachella Valley Optometry today.