

Glaucoma

*“Jesus was moved with pity for them and touched their eyes.
And instantly they could see, and followed him.” Matthew 20:34*

Glaucoma is the name given to a group of diseases that can destroy the main nerve of the eye, known as the optic nerve. The optic nerve carries the images seen by the eye directly to the brain. Glaucoma is sneaky—the only symptom a person will normally experience is a very gradual loss of vision. While glaucoma can be easily treated and further loss of vision can be prevented, it cannot be cured. It is believed that about 4 million Americans have glaucoma, but only half of these people have been diagnosed! Left untreated, glaucoma leads to blindness. There is no pain associated with glaucoma, and no early warning signs. The **only** way to make sure it doesn't sneak up on you is to have regular eye exams.

The two main types of glaucoma are open angle glaucoma and closed angle glaucoma. Open angle glaucoma is the most common type by far, and occurs when the tear ducts become clogged. Normally, our tear ducts allow fluid to flow out of the eye, but with this kind of glaucoma, the canal gradually becomes blocked deep inside the duct. Fluid cannot drain normally and causes a build up of pressure inside the eye. Closed angle glaucoma is much less common, and happens very quickly when the eye canal closes suddenly. There may be symptoms such as headaches, blurred vision, rainbows seen around lights at night, and eye pain. This acute, but rare, condition must be treated with surgery.

Anyone can develop glaucoma, but there are certain groups of people who are at greater risk. These include:

- African Americans
- People over 60 years of age
- A Family history of glaucoma
- Hispanics and Asians
- History of eye injury

For most cases of glaucoma, eye drops are prescribed. These reduce the pressure in the eye and prevent damage to the optic nerve. There are many different kinds of eye drops, and these are prescribed by an Ophthalmologist. Sometimes, surgery is needed, but in most cases, this is effective for a limited amount of time and cannot cure glaucoma.

Diagnosis is pretty straightforward, and can be done by an Optometrist or Ophthalmologist. The tonometry test uses a puff of air to measure the inner pressure of the eye. Measurements over time are watched for any changes that might indicate the

beginning of glaucoma. A complete eye exam with a handheld tool (an ophthalmoscope), which allows the doctor to look through the pupil and into the eye, is a must.

According to the World Health Organization, Glaucoma is the second most common cause of blindness across the world. Early detection and treatment are the keys to protecting our eyes from this sneaky condition. So protect your precious eyesight with regular eye exams.

More info: www.glaucoma.org
www.medicinenet.com