

January is National Glaucoma Awareness Month

If you have any risk factors for glaucoma or would like to be screened, come on over to the Occupational Medicine Clinic for a tonometry test. Then speak to a doctor or nurse afterward to discuss your results.

Glaucoma: Keeping an Eye on a Leading Cause of Blindness

Glaucoma has been called “the silent thief of sight.” A generally painless condition, glaucoma often goes unnoticed in its early stages. Glaucoma attacks peripheral vision first, unlike macular degeneration, which affects central vision.

Glaucoma is an eye disease in which the pressure within the eye gets too high. This pressure very slowly damages the optic nerve that connects the eye to the brain and if left untreated can cause irreversible loss of vision.

More than three million Americans are estimated to have glaucoma, but only half of them know they have it, according to the [Glaucoma Research Foundation](#).

Are you at higher risk for glaucoma? You could be if you:

- Are African American and age 40 or older
- Are over age 60, especially if you are Hispanic/Latino
- Have a family history of the disease
- Have serious injuries or internal inflammations of the eye.

Most glaucoma is the primary open angle variety that occurs as people get older. Glaucoma is like a plumbing problem in the eye. There is a drain called trabecular meshwork and a faucet called the ciliary body that makes the fluid. When the drain gets clogged, the pressure starts to build up.

How do you detect and treat glaucoma?

- An eye pressure check (tonometry) is a routine part of any glaucoma exam.
- Everyone at higher risk should get a comprehensive dilated eye exam (with an ophthalmologist or an optometrist), which is different from the basic eye exam for glasses. Early detection and treatment is the key to preserving your vision.

After diagnosis by a trained specialist, glaucoma can be monitored and managed. Treatment traditionally involves instilling pressure lowering eye drops at home, one to three times a day. Another painless option is a five to ten minute laser treatment that also can lower eye pressure, while decreasing or eliminating the need for eye drops.

In more advanced and unresponsive cases, various surgical procedures may be necessary to manage the glaucoma.

Do you want to learn more?

1. National Institutes of Health: [Facts about Glaucoma](#) (and watch the video)
2. The American Academy of Ophthalmology's [glaucoma video](#).
3. The Centers for Disease Control's [Frequently Asked Questions about glaucoma](#).