

## Glaucoma - detection and management

It is estimated that 210,000 Australians have glaucoma and half of them don't know it. Glaucoma develops gradually over a number of years – without any noticeable symptoms - until a person's side vision starts to disappear. This is why it is known as 'the sneak thief of sight'. If not treated it can lead to blindness.

### **Glaucoma slowly causes damage to eyes**

Glaucoma is the name given to a group of eye diseases in which the nerve that connects the eye to the brain is slowly damaged. In most people, this damage occurs when there is an increase in pressure in the eye, caused by a blockage of the eye's drainage system.

If glaucoma is not detected early and treated, it can lead to vision loss and blindness. This damage is irreversible.

### **Check your family history**

The most common form of glaucoma is open-angle glaucoma. Because glaucoma often runs in families, you should ask family members (mother, father, aunts, uncles, brother and sister) if they know of anyone in the family who has glaucoma. If the answer is yes, your risk may be six to 10 times higher of developing glaucoma. Although you may not develop the disease, you should have regular eye exams after you reach age of 40.

The examination should consist of:

- An examination of the back of the eye through a dilated pupil (drops make the pupil larger)
- An eye pressure test
- A visual field assessment.

### **Glaucoma can affect everyone**

Everyone is at risk of developing glaucoma but some people have a higher risk. You are in the higher risk group if you:

- Have a family history of glaucoma
- Are aged 50 or over.

### **Glaucoma causes loss of peripheral vision**

Vision damage is gradual. In the most common form of glaucoma, it starts with the loss of side vision (peripheral vision) and there is no pain or discomfort associated with it. One eye compensates for the other and the person remains unaware of any eye problem until the side vision is severely affected. When side vision is seriously affected, objects in front can be seen clearly but those to the side may be missed. If the disease continues unchecked and untreated, the field of vision progressively narrows (tunnel vision). Eventually, this will cause blindness.

### **Several treatments available**

Although glaucoma cannot be cured, it can be controlled with:

- Regular use of prescribed eye drops or tablets
- Laser surgery
- Surgery.

### **Where to get help**

- See Your doctor.

## Things to remember

- Glaucoma is a common eye disease.
- Glaucoma often runs in families.
- Vision loss or blindness can usually be prevented when glaucoma is detected early and treated.
- Glaucoma can be controlled, but it can't be cured.
- If you are at risk, take action now before you notice any eye problems.

**This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:**

Centre for Eye Research Australia

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