

# Glaucoma

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## **WHAT IS GLAUCOMA?**

Glaucoma is an eye disease in which it is thought the internal pressure of your eye rises to a point that the optic nerve is damaged. The pressure that builds up is due to a problem in the production, flow or drainage of fluid normally produced in your eye. Glaucoma is one of the leading causes of blindness in Canada.

## **WHAT CAUSES GLAUCOMA?**

The exact cause of glaucoma is not known. For some reason, there is an overproduction of fluid and / or the passages that normally allow fluid within your eye to drain out become clogged or blocked. This results in fluid building up within your eye and increasing pressure on the optic nerve. The nerve fibers and blood vessels in the optic nerve can easily be damaged by this pressure. An injury, infection or tumor in or around the eye can also cause the pressure to rise.

## **WHO GETS GLAUCOMA?**

Glaucoma most frequently occurs in individuals over the age of 40 and there is a hereditary tendency for the development of the disease in some families. Primary open-angle glaucoma causes damage at an earlier age and leads to blindness at a much greater rate. There is also a greater risk of developing glaucoma when you have diabetes, high blood pressure and eye injuries. Regular optometric examinations are important for all ages to assess your risk for glaucoma.

## **WHY IS GLAUCOMA HARMFUL TO VISION?**

The optic nerve, at the back of the eye, carries visual information to the brain. As the fibers that make up the optic nerve are damaged, the amount and quality of information sent to the brain decreases and a loss of vision occurs.

## **WILL I GO BLIND FROM GLAUCOMA?**

If diagnosed at an early stage, glaucoma can be controlled and little or no further vision loss should occur. If left untreated, side awareness (peripheral vision) and central vision will be destroyed and almost complete blindness may occur.

### **HOW CAN I TELL IF I HAVE GLAUCOMA?**

Primary open-angle glaucoma often develops painlessly and gradually. There are no early warning signs. It can gradually destroy your vision without you knowing it. Acute angle-closure glaucoma may have symptoms such as nausea, eye pain, red eyes, blurred vision and haloes around lights.

### **HOW IS GLAUCOMA DETECTED?**

A comprehensive ocular health examination is often the only way to detect glaucoma. Your optometrist can include in your examination a simple and painless procedure called tonometry, which measures the internal pressure of your eye. Your optometrist will also look into your eye to observe the health of the optic nerve and measure your field of vision.

### **HOW IS GLAUCOMA TREATED?**

Treatment via eye drops and surgery is usually effective in maintaining your remaining vision. Once vision is lost due to glaucoma, it cannot be restored. This is why regular preventive eye exams are so important.