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Glaucoma

Glaucoma is an eye disease in which the passages that allow fluid in the eye to drain become clogged or blocked. This results in the amount of fluid in the eye building up and causing increased pressure inside the eye. This increased pressure damages the optic nerve, which connects the eye to the brain. The optic nerve is the main carrier of vision information to the brain. Damage to it results in less information sent to the brain and a loss of vision.

The exact cause of glaucoma is not known and it cannot currently be prevented. It is one of the leading causes of blindness in the United States. But, if detected at an early stage and treated promptly, glaucoma can usually be controlled with little or no further vision loss. Regular optometric examinations are therefore important. People of all ages can develop glaucoma, but it most frequently occurs in the following populations:

- Those older than 40 years
- Those with a family history of glaucoma
- Those who are very nearsighted
- Diabetics
- Blacks

Of the different types of glaucoma, primary open-angle glaucoma often develops gradually and painlessly without warning signs or symptoms. This type of glaucoma is more common among blacks than whites. It can cause damage and lead to blindness more quickly in blacks, making regular eye examinations, including tests for glaucoma, particularly important for blacks older than 35 years. Another type, acute-angle closure glaucoma, may be accompanied by the following symptoms:

- Blurred vision
- A loss of side vision
- Appearance of colored rings around lights
- Pain or redness in the eyes

Regular eye examinations are an important means of detecting glaucoma in its early stages and include the following:

- Tonometry: a simple and painless measurement of the pressure in the eye
- Ophthalmoscopy: an examination of the back of the eye to observe the health of the optic nerve
- Visual field test: a check for the development of abnormal blind spots

Glaucoma can usually be treated effectively by eye drops or other medicines. In some cases surgery may be necessary. Unfortunately, any loss of vision from glaucoma usually cannot be restored. But, early detection, prompt treatment, and regular monitoring can enable you to continue living in much the same way as you have always lived.

Protect your eye health and your vision; be sure to visit your doctor of optometry regularly.

