

Glaucoma:

The Silent Thief

Glaucoma refers to a family of diseases that damage the optic nerve and is one of the leading causes of blindness in Canada. It is a progressive disease that most frequently occurs in individuals over the age of 40, with the risk of the disease increasing with age. There is also a greater risk of developing glaucoma for people with diabetes, high blood pressure, a history of eye injuries or a family history of glaucoma.

Symptoms

Elevated pressure within the eye damages the optic nerve, which can lead to serious vision loss if not detected and treated early. The optic nerve is the nerve that takes all of the information from the eye and transmits that information to the brain.

In open angle glaucoma, the most common form of glaucoma, there are usually no symptoms until the individual experiences peripheral vision loss, which is why glaucoma is referred to as “the silent thief.” In a more rare form of the disease, called closed angle glaucoma, there is a sudden rise in the pressure within the eye, and the individual may experience pain, blurred vision and see halos around lights. Untreated, both forms can lead to complete loss of vision.

Detection and Prevention

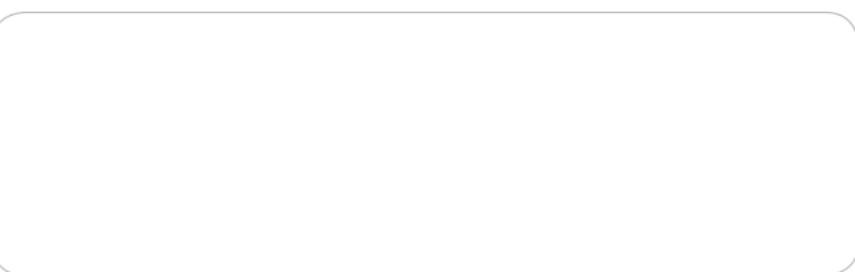
As there is no way to prevent glaucoma, a comprehensive eye examination with your Doctor of Optometry is the only way to detect the disease. Even if you see well or don't wear glasses, regular eye exams help detect glaucoma early enough to prevent vision loss.

Your Doctor of Optometry will perform a simple and painless procedure during your routine eye exam, which measures the internal pressure of your eye. Your Doctor will also look into your eye to observe the health of the optic nerve and measure your field of vision, and determine if there is a need for additional imaging.

Treatment

If detected and treated early, eye drops and laser surgery are usually effective at maintaining your vision, and little or no further vision loss should occur. If left untreated, peripheral vision is affected first, followed by central vision loss during late stages of the disease. Complete blindness may occur. Special equipment may be used to image your eye to better monitor the progression of glaucoma.

Doctors of Optometry are a single source for all your vision, eye health and eyewear needs. For information about many other common eye-related conditions, visit our website's Eye Health Library. For answers to commonly asked questions, visit our Ask a Doctor of Optometry Facebook page at facebook.com/AskadoctorofOptometry.



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