

Wellness Articles

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If you would like to be added to the distribution list for these articles, please email: Rebecca.johnson2@albertahealthservices.ca. You will receive a monthly email containing articles for the upcoming four weeks.

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Learn the symptoms for glaucoma

World Glaucoma Week takes place Mar. 7 to 13.

Glaucoma is the name for a group of eye diseases that damage the optic nerve. This nerve carries information from the eye to the brain. When the nerve is damaged, you can lose your vision.

Glaucoma is one of the most common causes of legal blindness in the world. At first, people with glaucoma lose side (peripheral) vision. But if the disease isn't treated, vision loss may get worse. This can lead to total blindness over time.

What causes glaucoma?

The exact cause isn't known. Experts think that increased pressure in the eye (intraocular pressure) may cause the nerve damage in many cases. But some people who have glaucoma have normal eye pressure.

Some people get glaucoma after an eye injury or after eye surgery. Some medicines such as corticosteroids that are used to treat other diseases may also cause glaucoma.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms vary depending on the kind of glaucoma you have.

- If you have Open-Angle Glaucoma, the only symptom you are likely to notice is loss of vision. Side vision is often lost before central vision.
- Symptoms of Closed-Angle Glaucoma can be mild, with symptoms such as blurred vision that only lasts a short time. Severe signs include longer-lasting episodes of blurred vision or pain in or around the eye. You may also see coloured halos around lights, have red eyes, or feel sick to your stomach and vomit.

- Signs of Congenital Glaucoma may include watery eyes and sensitivity to light. Your baby may rub their eyes, squint, or keep the eyes closed much of the time.

How is glaucoma diagnosed?

Glaucoma can be diagnosed:

- During routine examinations with your eye doctor. An optometrist can screen you for glaucoma but will have to consult an ophthalmologist to confirm the diagnosis.
- When you go to your family doctor because of an eye problem.

How is it treated?

Glaucoma can't be cured. To help keep your vision from getting worse, you'll probably need to use medicine (most likely eye drops) every day. You may also need laser treatment or surgery. You'll also need regular checkups with your eye doctor.

How do you cope with glaucoma?

Vision aids, such as large-print items and special video systems, may help you cope with reduced eyesight. Support groups and counselling may also help.