

GLAUCOMA - ACUTE CLOSED ANGLE

Angle closure glaucoma occurs when there is a sudden increase in fluid pressure inside the eye. Normally, fluid is secreted into the eye to help nourish structures inside the eye. When the drainage channel is blocked, fluid pressure increases, causing severe pain and loss of vision. Rainbow colored haloes are seen around lights, and the severe pain often causes nausea and vomiting. Patients who are pre-disposed to this condition generally have a narrow area through which the fluid drains, making it more easily blocked by the iris, the colored part of the eye.

Angle closure glaucoma requires immediate treatment. Every effort is made to reduce the fluid pressure in the eye, by using eye drops and oral medication. Laser surgery is used to make a small permanent hole in the iris, so that fluid can pass through to the drainage channel, even if it is again blocked by the iris. If this glaucoma is left untreated, permanent loss of vision occurs.

OCULAR HYPERTENSION

Fluid is secreted into the eye to help nourish structures inside the eye. After circulating, the fluid drains out of the eye. When drainage from the eye is reduced, the pressure inside the eye increases. Increased pressure causes damage by interfering with the blood supply in the small blood vessels serving the optic nerve. When the blood supply to the nerve is decreased, degeneration of the nerve and loss of vision result. Increased pressure on the nerve also damages the delicate tissue through which the nerve fibers pass from the retina. This causes damage to the nerve fibers and loss of vision and is termed glaucoma.

Ocular hypertension describes a condition where the fluid pressure inside the eye is above normal but there is no clinically detectable loss of vision or damage to the optic nerve and retinal fibers, the changes which would indicate glaucoma and the need for treatment. Patients with ocular hypertension require no treatment, but frequent evaluation is critical to determine if damage is occurring.

GLAUCOMA — PRIMARY OPEN ANGLE

Open angle glaucoma is a slowly progressive disease which causes decreased vision, ranging from only slight loss to absolute blindness. Both eyes are affected. There are no symptoms until loss of vision occurs, at which point the structures in the eye have already been substantially damaged.

Damage inside the eye occurs when there is an increase in the fluid pressure inside the eye. Normally, fluid is secreted into the eye to help nourish structures inside the eye. When drainage from the eye is reduced, pressure inside the eye increases. Increased pressure inside the eye causes damage by interfering with the blood supply in the small blood vessels serving the optic nerve. When the blood supply to the nerve is decreased, degeneration of the nerve and loss of vision result. Increased pressure on the nerve also damages the delicate tissue through which the nerve fibers pass from the retina.

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People who have a family history of glaucoma, and those who are diabetic, nearsighted, or black have a higher risk of developing glaucoma.

Treatment is aimed at lowering the pressure inside the eye, in order to prevent further nerve damage. There are no set rules about when to begin therapy or which therapy to use. Eye drops are typically the first type of medication used. If they are not effective, oral medication or surgery is indicated. Using the medication as prescribed is extremely important in controlling the disease. If left untreated, glaucoma can lead to blindness.

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