

# Adult Health Bulletin



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## THIS MONTH'S TOPIC: GLAUCOMA

**M**ost people would say that having sight is important for their everyday living. When a person has glaucoma, he or she has a disease that can lead to the loss of that sight. Luckily, glaucoma does not have to lead to blindness if it is found and controlled. In this newsletter you will learn more about glaucoma, some of the ways an eye doctor may test for glaucoma and the risk factors for glaucoma.

It is estimated that more than 2.7 million Americans over age 40 have glaucoma. At least half of those people do not even realize it.

### What is glaucoma?

Glaucoma is an eye disease that damages the optic nerve. The optic



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# If you have not had an eye exam in the past few years, now may be a good time to schedule one.

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nerve is the nerve that moves information gathered from your eye to the brain. When a person has glaucoma, he or she may start to lose vision. This usually happens in patches, starting with the side vision (also known as peripheral vision). A person might not realize that he or she has lost vision until the disease is advanced and affecting the vision when looking straight ahead. Unfortunately, once it is lost, the vision cannot be restored. It is important to see an eye doctor regularly so that you can be tested for glaucoma.

### How does a doctor check for glaucoma?

There are several tests the eye doctor can do to determine if you have glaucoma. Below are just some of the more common tests.

- **Ophthalmoscopy:** This test allows the doctor to look at your optic nerve. The doctor will place a few drops into the eye that will dilate, or open, the pupil. This allows the doctor to get a better look at the optic nerve.
- **Optic nerve and retinal imaging:** Basically, this is like taking a photo. This too may involve dilating your eye to get a better image of your optic nerve.
- **Tonometry:** This is a test that determines how much pressure you have in your eye. Sometimes this test is done in a non-contact method. This may be more commonly known as the air puff test. The doctor may also use a method that involves eye contact. To do so, the doctor

*If you have a family member with glaucoma, you are more likely to get glaucoma. If someone in your family has glaucoma, encourage your family members to get complete eye exams on a regular basis.*

will use drops that will numb the eye. Then the doctor will use an instrument that gently presses on the outside of your eye.

- **Perimetry:** This is a test that examines your field of vision. At most locations this test is done using a computerized system. Basically, this test reveals areas in the eye where vision is lacking.

### What are the risk factors for glaucoma?

There are several risk factors for developing glaucoma. Talk to your eye doctor about your risks.

- **Age:** As you age, there is an increased risk for glaucoma. This is especially true if you are 60 years old or older. African Americans are at a greater risk, at a younger age, starting at age 40 and older. Hispanics are also at increased risk for glaucoma as they age.
- **Race:** Unfortunately, African Americans over the age of 40 are 4 to 5 times more likely to have glaucoma than others.
- **Family history:** If you have a family member with glaucoma, you are more likely to get glaucoma. If someone in your family has glaucoma, encourage your family members to get complete eye exams on a regular basis.
- **Medical history:** If you have ever been told that you have had high pressure in your eyes, had a previous eye injury or nearsightedness, you are at a higher risk for glaucoma.

Glaucoma is a serious eye disease. It is important to get regular eye exams which include tests for glaucoma. If you have not had an eye exam in the past few years, now may be a good time to schedule one.

#### REFERENCE:

<http://www.preventblindness.org/glaucoma-learning-center>

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