

Don't Let Glaucoma Steal Your Sight

Peter Filipov, M.D.

Every day, in ophthalmology offices around the country, aging baby boomers and older seniors hear devastating news: Their sight is being stolen from them by Glaucoma, almost always without their knowledge. That's because Glaucoma is a silent thief – a patient usually experiences no symptoms until the optic nerve is damaged and vision is compromised.

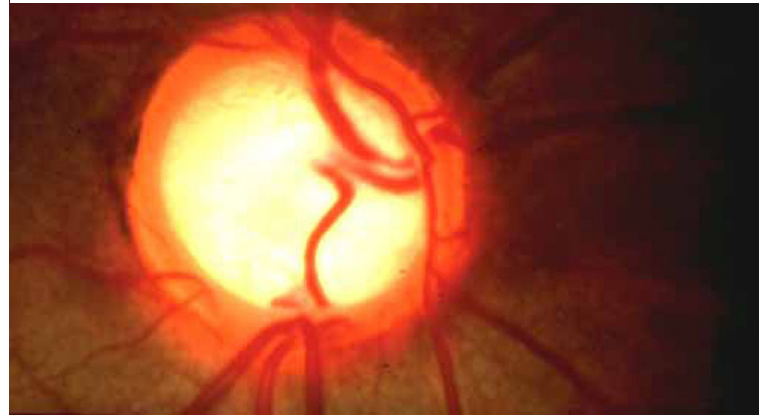
By definition, Glaucoma is a condition in which the optic nerve is progressively damaged over time. It is usually associated with an increased pressure inside our eyes. The optic nerve is not a single nerve but a bundle of more than one million individual nerves, all carrying information to the visual portions of our brain. The term “Glaucoma” is actually applied to a group of related conditions all of which create this damage in some way. However, no matter which type of Glaucoma you develop, left untreated, the results are the same: Permanent loss of vision and eventual blindness.

There's no cure for Glaucoma, but there is treatment, which is why annual eye exams are so important. Checking for Glaucoma is a part of every complete eye exam, and if you are in a high risk group, those exams hold even greater importance.

The average person's risk of developing Glaucoma increases with age. In infants the risk is one in 10,000. By age 20, the risk is still less than one percent. However, by age 70, over eighty percent of Americans have elevated eye pressure. Unfortunately, age is not the whole story. There are risk factors which can profoundly increase the chances of developing Glaucoma. Consider whether you might be in a high risk group:

- **Seniors.** People over age 60 are six times more likely to develop glaucoma than the general population – and that is *without* any additional risk factors.
- **African-American heritage.** African-Americans are six-to-eight times more likely to develop Glaucoma – and it is the leading cause of blindness for African-Americans.
- **Asian heritage.** If you are of Asian descent, you are at a significantly higher risk for a fairly rare form called Narrow Angle Glaucoma.
- **Hispanics over age 60.** The risk here seems to be much more significant than the general population.
- **Nearsighted.** Because of the shape of your eyes, people who are nearsighted are at higher risk.
- **Hypertension and Diabetes.** Whether you have one or both, your risk jumps.
- **Family history.** Someone with a parent or sibling with glaucoma is four-to-nine times more likely to develop it.

An optic nerve that has been damaged by Glaucoma.



The earlier Glaucoma is detected, the more effectively it can be treated. Depending on the type of Glaucoma and the severity, treatments can include prescription eye drops, medication, laser treatments, and/or traditional surgery to lower the pressure and prevent further damage. These treatments can prevent further damage almost 90 percent of the time.

The sad truth is that almost three million Americans have Glaucoma. Almost half remain undiagnosed. Treatment can prevent further damage but it does not restore sight that is already lost. Peripheral vision is lost first. Our practice has patients with 20/20 vision who cannot see the person standing next to them. Eventually, even the central vision can slowly fade away. Glaucoma may be a silent thief but you can proactively defend yourself. A routine annual eye exam can detect Glaucoma early and preserve vision. GLM

Dr. Peter Filipov is a leading ophthalmologist and eye surgeon on the Maryland Eastern Shore. He has practiced at the Azar Eye Institute since 1997, after serving as a staff ophthalmologist at Andrews Air Force Base. Filipov is also a surgical instructor at Georgetown University. To schedule a free Glaucoma screening, contact the Azar Eye Institute.

Glaucoma...

...is damage to the optic nerve.

Sometimes associated with internal eye pressure caused when the aqueous humor cannot properly drain.

Symptomless in early stages, it can damage the optic nerve & result in blindness.

Truth – Or Consequences About Glaucoma

Keeping your sight, if you are at risk of Glaucoma, requires knowing how to separate fact from myth. Here, Dr. Filipov debunks three important myths of the disease.

Myth: Glaucoma is easy to detect without a doctor.

Fact: Glaucoma is a painless, need-less loss of vision. Patients can't feel Glaucoma, so they need to see their eye doctor regularly, even if they don't think they have a problem. Many patients can control their Glaucoma with as little as a single eye-drop per day.

Myth: You don't have glaucoma if you have normal eye pressure.

Fact: Glaucoma and eye pressure are commonly thought to be related. Increased eye pressure does put you at risk for Glaucoma, but it doesn't guarantee that you will get the disease. On the other hand, it is also possible to develop Glaucoma without experiencing any increase in eye pressure. (Normal Tension Glaucoma)

Myth: Glaucoma is a disease of the elderly.

Fact: Everyone is at risk for Glaucoma, from babies to Grand Citizens. Older people are at a higher risk for Glaucoma, but younger baby boomers (and even young adults) can develop Glaucoma.

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