



# Live Healthy Georgia

## Seniors Taking Charge

### Preventing Blindness: Glaucoma Awareness

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By Whitney Bignell, MS, BSFCS, BSEd

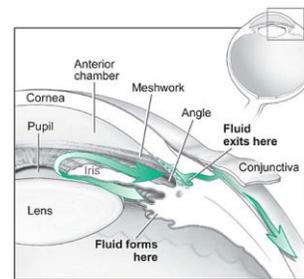
Did you know that January is National Glaucoma Awareness month? This month's newsletter provides some startling facts about glaucoma in the United States, information about diagnosis, and resources for treatment options. Keep reading to protect your eyesight.

#### Glaucoma in the United States

- An estimated 4 million Americans have glaucoma
  - Only half are aware
- Approximately 120,000 are blind from the disease
  - 9-12% of all blind people
- Second leading cause of blindness in the world
  - Leading cause of blindness among African-Americans
  - African-Americans are 6-8 times more likely to develop glaucoma than Caucasians
- 74% of 1000 surveyed adults have an eye exam every 2 years
  - But only 61% of those have received a dilated eye exam, the most effective way to diagnose glaucoma
- Glaucoma is not curable, and eyesight lost cannot be regained

#### What is glaucoma?

Glaucoma refers to a group of diseases that result from damage to the eye's optic nerve. The most common form of glaucoma is "open-angle" in which fluid that normally drains from the eye moves very slowly through the meshwork drain, causing pressure to build in the eye. However, glaucoma can occur without increased eye pressure, and increased eye pressure does not necessarily lead to glaucoma.



#### Who's at risk for glaucoma?

Everyone! Approximately 1 out of 10,000 babies born in the United States has glaucoma. However, people who are African-American, over age 60, diabetic, extremely near-sighted, or have a close relative diagnosed with glaucoma are at highest risk. It is important for everyone to have their eyes examined. **People age 65 and older should have their eyes examined every 6-12 months.**

## **What are the symptoms of glaucoma?**

Glaucoma is often called a silent disease, as there are few symptoms until it has progressed. Most people experience a loss of peripheral vision first, and it may seem like you're looking through a tunnel. As the disease advances, people lose their central vision, as well, which ultimately may lead to blindness.

## **How is glaucoma diagnosed?**

A comprehensive dilated eye exam helps your eye doctor know what is normal eye pressure for you (every person is different) so that changes can be monitored and action taken if a change occurs. The dilated eye exam also allows your doctor to see signs of damage to your retina and optic nerve. **Remember, your vision will likely be blurry for several hours after this exam, so be sure that someone else drives you to and from the doctor.**

## **Treatment Options**

Glaucoma, if diagnosed early, is often treated with medications in the form of eye drops or pills that lower eye pressure. Surgery may also be required. **While this disease does not have a cure, its progression can be delayed if diagnosed early.**

For more information, visit [The Glaucoma Research Foundation's Treatment web page](http://www.glaucoma.org/treatment/) (www.glaucoma.org/treatment/).

## **Can I prevent glaucoma?**

While there is no known prevention for glaucoma, certain habits can help decrease eye pressure. Regular exercise of moderate intensity has been shown to decrease eye pressure, in addition to all of

the other wonderful benefits. While yoga helps reduce stress and increases flexibility, you should avoid inverted poses, which increase eye pressure, if you have glaucoma. Wearing protective eyewear is also important when doing activities that may lead to trauma to the eye, such as home improvement projects. Some forms of glaucoma result from injury to the eye.



## **More Health Awareness Topics in January**

[Cervical Health Awareness Month](#)

[Thyroid Awareness Month](#)

[National Birth Defects Prevention Month](#)

[National Radon Action Month](#)

[National Folic Acid Awareness \(Jan 8-14\)](#)

Visit <http://healthfinder.gov/nho/nho.asp> for more information on these topics.

## **References:**

Glaucoma Research Foundation.

<http://www.glaucoma.org/>

National Eye Institute, National Institutes of Health. Facts About Glaucoma.

[http://www.nei.nih.gov/health/glaucoma/glaucoma\\_facts.asp#a](http://www.nei.nih.gov/health/glaucoma/glaucoma_facts.asp#a)

## **Images:**

1. <http://www.completeeye.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/glaucoma-vision-image.jpg>
2. [http://www.nei.nih.gov/health/glaucoma/glaucoma\\_facts.asp#a](http://www.nei.nih.gov/health/glaucoma/glaucoma_facts.asp#a)
3. <http://images.agoramedia.com/everydayhealth/qcms/exercises-to-prevent-falls-with-arthritis-05-pg-full.jpg>

**Have a Safe  
and  
Healthy 2012!**