

What to Expect if You Have Glaucoma

Glaucoma is an eye disease that can lead to blindness if not treated. While there is no cure for glaucoma, there are effective treatments that can save your sight. If you have glaucoma, it is necessary to have regular follow up visits to your eye doctor. The purpose of these visits is to make sure that your glaucoma is well controlled and not getting worse. Glaucoma gets worse very slowly, and because there are no symptoms that you can detect to tell if your glaucoma is getting worse. So regular visits—at least 2-3 every year—are very important to make you're your glaucoma is not getting worse. During these visits, you will likely undergo a number of tests evaluating the status of your glaucoma.

At every visit, your eye pressure will be measured. High eye pressure is thought to play a role in the damage that destroys vision. The goal of glaucoma treatment is to lower eye pressure. This is usually achieved with eye drop medications. Checking your eye pressure at each visit lets your doctor know if your drugs are still working effectively. There are several ways to measure eye pressure, including an air puff or a blue light.

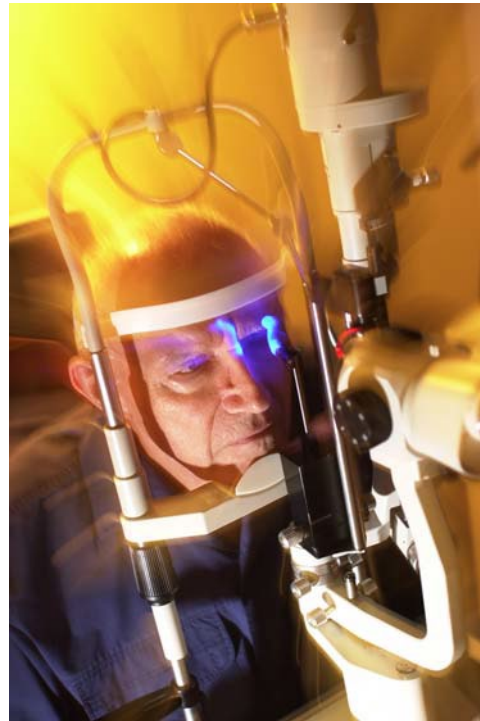
Your doctor may also measure the thickness of your cornea. The cornea is the clear window covering the front of the eye. The thickness of your cornea may affect the accuracy of your eye pressure measurements. Knowing your corneal thickness may help your doctor to determine your risk of getting worse from glaucoma, and to adjust your treatment to better control your glaucoma.

Occasionally, your doctor will dilate your pupils to carefully examine your optic nerves. The optic nerve connects the eye to the brain, and is the structure that is damaged in glaucoma. When the optic nerve is damaged by glaucoma, you gradually lose your peripheral vision. You may also have a computerized optic nerve scan. The purpose of these evaluations is to measure the amount of glaucoma damage you have, and to determine if your glaucoma is stable or is getting worse. If it is getting worse, your doctor will change your treatment to further lower your eye pressure.

Since optic nerve damage destroys your peripheral vision, you will periodically take a visual field test to measure your peripheral vision. During this test,

you will push a button when you see a small light appear in different parts of your peripheral vision. The visual field test provides your doctor with a map of your remaining peripheral vision. If your glaucoma is continuing to steal your peripheral vision over time, your doctor will change your treatment to further lower your eye pressure.

These various tests are all necessary to make sure that your eye pressure has been lowered enough to stop glaucoma from stealing your sight. Keeping your appointments faithfully, and using your eye drop medications regularly as prescribed, are important in keeping your glaucoma under control and saving your sight.



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Left, a patient undergoes an IOP measurement.