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Health and wellness tips for your work, home and life—brought to you by the insurance specialists at Cook, Hall & Hyde, Inc.

Vision Care: Glaucoma

Glaucoma leads to blindness by damaging the optic nerve.

Elevated pressure in the eye is a risk factor, but even people with normal pressure can lose vision to glaucoma.

Glaucoma is a group of eye diseases that gradually steal sight without warning. Vision loss is caused by damage to the optic nerve. This nerve acts like an electric cable with over a million wires. It is responsible for carrying images from the eye to the brain.

Adult glaucoma falls into two categories—open angle glaucoma and closed angle glaucoma. These are marked by an increase of intraocular pressure (IOP), or pressure inside the eye. When optic nerve damage has occurred despite a normal IOP, this is called normal tension glaucoma. Secondary glaucoma refers to any case in which another disease causes or contributes to increased eye pressure, resulting in optic nerve damage and vision loss.

Signs and Symptoms

In the early stages of the disease, there may be no symptoms. Glaucoma is painless, and patients do not realize they are losing their vision until the later stages,

when the damage is irreversible.

When symptoms do appear, usually after the disease has progressed, they are in the form of:

- Loss of side, or peripheral, vision
- Difficulty focusing on close words
- Seeing colored rings or halos around lights
- Headaches and eye pain
- Frequent changes of corrective lens prescriptions
- Difficulty adjusting the eyes to the dark

Risk Factors

Anyone can get glaucoma, but some people have a greater risk of developing the condition, including:

- People over age 40 who have not had regular eye exams
- Anyone over the age of 60
- People with a family history of glaucoma
- Those with abnormally high intraocular pressure
- People of African descent, especially those over the age of 40

- Diabetics
- Those with myopia (nearsightedness)
- People who have undergone long-term steroid or cortisone use
- Those with a previous eye injury

Prevention and Treatment

There is no cure for glaucoma—yet. However, medication or surgery can slow or prevent further vision loss. The appropriate treatment depends upon the type of glaucoma, among other factors. Early detection is vital to stopping the progress of the disease. Be sure to get regular eye exams (every three to five years under age 40, and every two to four years age 40 and older).



Did You Know...?

Termed the “sneak thief of sight,” glaucoma gradually steals a person’s sight without warning, and often without symptoms. In fact, at least half of the people who have glaucoma do not know it. Unfortunately, untreated glaucoma is the second-leading cause of irreversible blindness.