



Pharmaceutical  
Society of Australia

Self Care  
™ Health Advice for Life

# Glaucoma

**Glaucoma is a disease that damages the optic nerves that connect the eye to the brain. It can cause vision loss and blindness if left untreated. As glaucoma may not cause any obvious symptoms in the early stages, it is important to have your eyes checked regularly by an optometrist or ophthalmologist.**

There are several different forms of glaucoma including chronic open-angle glaucoma and acute closed-angle glaucoma.

## Chronic open-angle glaucoma

Chronic open-angle glaucoma is the most common form of glaucoma. It is usually, but not always, accompanied by high pressure inside the eye. This high pressure occurs when the fluid that nourishes the eye cannot drain properly from the eye. This pressure can damage the optic nerve and retina at the back of the eye, leading to permanent vision loss.

## Signs and symptoms

Chronic open-angle glaucoma causes a gradual loss of sight. Side vision is lost first and vision loss slowly spreads to include central vision. Glaucoma may not cause any noticeable symptoms in the early stages and many people are unaware that they have it until their vision is significantly impaired.

## Treatment

Treatment for glaucoma aims to reduce pressure inside the eye, by reducing the amount of fluid flowing into the eye or increasing fluid drainage from the eye. It can save remaining eyesight, but cannot restore parts of vision that have been lost. Chronic open-angle glaucoma is usually treated with eye drops. Sometimes laser treatment, eye surgery or a combination of treatments may be needed.

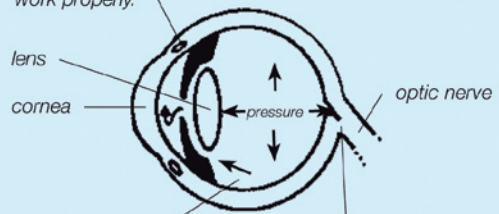
## Acute closed-angle glaucoma

Acute closed-angle glaucoma develops rapidly. It occurs when the fluid drainage canal in the eye suddenly becomes completely blocked, causing a rapid rise in eye pressure.

## Signs and symptoms

- Severe eye pain.
- Red eye.
- Blurred vision.

*The build up occurs when the canals which normally drain the fluid away don't work properly.*



*As new fluid comes into the eye, the pressure (intra-ocular pressure) rises.*

*When the pressure stays high over a period of time, damage to the blood vessels and nerves at the back of the eye can occur. The longer the pressure stays high, the worse the effect on eyesight.*

- Coloured rings around lights.
- Sensitivity to light.
- Nausea and vomiting.

Acute closed angle glaucoma normally affects only one eye at a time. It can cause blindness if not treated immediately. It is an emergency that needs urgent treatment, usually with laser or surgery.

## Who is at risk?

Anyone can get glaucoma, but some factors put people at a higher risk including:

- Raised intraocular pressure
- Increasing age, especially after 40 years
- A family history of glaucoma
- A high refractive error (needing strong glasses for distance vision)
- Eye injury
- Being male
- Sleep apnoea
- Corticosteroid medicines (e.g., prednisolone).

## Important

**The earlier glaucoma is discovered and treated, the greater the chance of preserving your remaining eyesight.**

Consult a doctor or optometrist regularly for an eye check if you:

- Have a family history of glaucoma
- Are over 40 years of age
- Have other risk factors for glaucoma.

Consult a doctor or optometrist promptly if you:

- Notice any changes or anything abnormal with your eye sight.

Consult a doctor immediately if you experience symptoms of acute closed-angle glaucoma.

## Testing for glaucoma

Tests used to diagnose glaucoma and monitor treatment can be performed by optometrists and ophthalmologists. They include:

- Measuring eye fluid pressure, called intraocular pressure (IOP)
- Inspecting the optic nerves and blood vessels in your eyes
- Testing your field of vision for blind spots or sight loss.

## Eye drops for glaucoma

Some types of glaucoma eye drops reduce the amount of fluid produced in the eye. Others open the fluid drainage canals.

- Eye drops for glaucoma must be used every day to keep eye pressure at a safe level.
- More than one type of eye drop may be needed to control eye pressure.
- The medicines in eye drops can be absorbed into the bloodstream and affect other parts of the body or interact with other medicines. It is important to instill the eye drops as directed – ask a pharmacist or doctor.
- Write the date on the eye drop bottle when you open it, and throw out the drops after 28 days, to avoid the risk of contamination.

## Self care

- Learn about the glaucoma medicines prescribed for you. Understand how they work and how to use them – ask your pharmacist and doctor.
- Use your glaucoma medicines every day, according to the directions given by your doctor.

Your **Self Care** Pharmacist

## How to use eye drops

1. Wash hands and sit or stand in front of a mirror.
2. Tilt head back and look upwards.
3. With eye open, gently pull down lower eyelid to form a pouch.
4. Approach eye from the side and squeeze one drop into pouch. Do not let the tip of the dropper or tube touch the eye, eye lashes or any other surface.
5. Let go of eye lid and close eye.
6. Press a finger gently against the inner corner of the eye (over the tear duct) for a few minutes. This stops drop draining away from the eye and reduces the amount that gets into the bloodstream.
7. For a second drop, wait several minutes after the first drop, to avoid washing out first drop.

- Do not run out of your glaucoma medicines and do not miss any doses.
- Tell all new doctors or health care professionals what medicines you are using for glaucoma.
- Talk to your doctor or pharmacist before using any other medicines, eye drops or eye washes.
- Carry an identification card (available from Glaucoma Australia).

## Related fact cards

- *Contact Lens Care*
- *Red and Dry Eyes*
- *Vision Impairment*

## For more information

**An optometrist** – listed under 'O' in the yellow pages of the phone book.

**Centre for Eye Research Australia** – website [www.cera.org.au](http://www.cera.org.au)

**Glaucoma Australia** – phone 1800 500 880 or website [www.glaucoma.org.au](http://www.glaucoma.org.au)

**Guide Dogs Australia** – phone 1800 804 805 or website [www.guidedogsaustralia.com](http://www.guidedogsaustralia.com)

**Optometrists Association Australia** – website [www.optometrists.asn.au](http://www.optometrists.asn.au)

**Vision 2020 Australia** – phone 03 9656 2020 or website [www.vision2020australia.org.au](http://www.vision2020australia.org.au)

**Vision Australia** – phone 1300 84 74 66 or website [www.visionaustralia.org.au](http://www.visionaustralia.org.au)

**Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)** leaflets – your pharmacist can advise on availability.

**NPS Medicines Line** – phone 1300 888 763 Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm EST.

**The Poisons Information Centre** – in case of poisoning phone 131 126 from anywhere in Australia.

Pharmacists are medicines experts. Ask a pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.