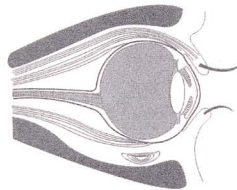


What is Glaucoma?

◆ Glaucoma is a group of eye diseases that cause a gradual loss of vision without warning and most often without symptoms. The vision loss is caused by damage to the optic nerve. Increased intraocular pressure can ultimately destroy the optic nerve cells. These nerve cells can eventually die, resulting in “blind spots” in the field of vision. Once visual loss occurs, it is irreversible and nothing can be done to restore the damaged cells.

It is important to understand that the individual response to eye pressure varies.



Some people develop optic nerve damage from relatively low pressures, while others sustain no damage from higher pressures. Half of the people who have glaucoma do not know they have the disease.

Open Angle Glaucoma

Open angle glaucoma is the most common type and affects at least three million Americans. There are no early warning symptoms. Open angle glaucoma gets its name because the angle in the eye where fluid drains out of the anterior chamber is open; but for some reason, fluid passes through the trabecular meshwork too slowly. As fluid backs up, the pressure inside the eye rises, which can damage the cells in the optic nerve.

Angle Closure Glaucoma

Angle closure, or narrow angle glaucoma is not as common as open angle glaucoma. In angle closure glaucoma the area in the eye called the angle is narrower than it should be. With age, the lens in the eye thickens, which can cause the anterior chamber to become even narrower. This can cause the pressure to build up behind the iris. If this space becomes completely blocked, the pressure rises rapidly, causing an acute angle closure attack. A sudden rise in eye pressure can occur within a few hours and the eye becomes very painful. An acute attack is an emergency condition and must be treated promptly. If your ophthalmologist determines that you may be at risk for an acute angle closure attack, it may be recommended that a YAG laser peripheral iridotomy be performed. The laser procedure can help to prevent an acute angle closure attack.

Low Tension Glaucoma

In low tension glaucoma, the optic nerve is damaged, even though the intraocular pressure is normal. Although the pressure readings are in the “normal range,” people with low pressures or low tension glaucoma may be very susceptible to optic nerve damage and treatment is needed to lower the pressure even further to avoid the optic nerve damage and visual field loss. Normal tension or low tension glaucoma may be related in part, to a poor blood supply to the optic nerve. It was once thought that

high intraocular pressures were the main cause of optic nerve damage. Although the intraocular pressures can be an important part of glaucoma, we now know that people with “normal” pressures can experience vision loss from glaucoma.

How do I know if I have Glaucoma?

◆ Because open angle glaucoma and low tension glaucoma have no symptoms, it is important that patients have regular eye examinations. Your ophthalmologist will have the intraocular pressures checked and will carefully evaluate your optic nerves. Visual field testing and optic nerve scans may be performed, along with pachymetry measurements, which measure your corneal thickness. An eye examination can also determine if you are at risk for an acute angle closure attack.

Everyone is at risk for glaucoma, however, certain factors can increase your risk. If you are diabetic or have a family history of glaucoma you may have a greater chance of having glaucoma. Age may also be a factor. People who are over 60 are six times more likely to develop glaucoma than those who are younger.