

# NATIONAL GLAUCOMA AWARENESS MONTH

January 2006

## AM I AT RISK FOR GLAUCOMA?

If you are 55 or older, you should get an eye exam at least once every two years. If you have diabetes or other health problems, you may need to see an eye doctor more often. A dilated eye exam will allow your eye doctor to check for glaucoma. Ask yourself these questions:

- Have I had an eye injury or eye surgery, even as a child?
- Am I very near-sighted?
- Have I taken steroids on a long-term basis?
- Do I qualify for the annual glaucoma screening benefit under Medicare?
- Most importantly: Have I had an eye exam recently?
- Am I 40 years of age or older?
- Did my parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents lose their sight? What was the cause of their vision loss?
- Do I have diabetes?
- Am I African-American or of Afro-Caribbean descent?



### How is glaucoma treated?

Glaucoma is sometimes referred to as the “sneak thief of sight.” There are between two and three million people who suffer from glaucoma. Nearly half don’t know that they have it. This disease has no early symptoms. Many medications used to treat glaucoma lower intraocular pressure. These medications come in drops, pills, ointments, gels, and wafer-like inserts. You and your doctor should work closely to determine the best medication for you.

### Some tips if you do have glaucoma:

- Seek encouragement from family, friends, and other sources, such as glaucoma patient support groups.
- You’ll be visiting your eye doctor regularly, so choose one with whom you are comfortable.
- Write down your questions and notes so that you can make the most of your doctor appointments.
- Tell your doctor, family, and friends about how medications are affecting you.
- Read materials from accurate sources to help you understand and live with glaucoma.
- Ask your doctor to write down your medication schedule.
- Always use the proper procedure for applying glaucoma medication.

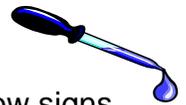
# FACTS ABOUT GLAUCOMA



Every person with glaucoma is different. You and your doctor are partners in care, and together you can find a workable solution. Glaucoma is one of three common eye diseases that can happen to people with diabetes. If you have diabetes, it is crucial that you visit your eye doctor for regular dilated eye exams.



- Glaucoma has very few symptoms in the early stages. By the time people notice any symptoms, a large part of their vision may already be lost.
- Glaucoma runs in families. If one family member has it, others should be checked.
- A fluid called aqueous humor needs to drain through channels at the front of the eye. In a person with glaucoma, the fluid does not drain correctly causing an increase in pressure on the optic nerve, which leads to damage.
- More than 2.2 million Americans age 40 and older have glaucoma. At least half do not know that they have it.
- At present, there is no cure. However, eye drops, pills or surgery can help control the disease.
- Some eye exams may not include dilating the pupils, which allows the doctor to check for possible nerve damage in the back of the eye. When scheduling an eye exam, make sure the doctor includes this procedure.
- For reasons yet unknown, African-Americans are four to five times more likely to develop glaucoma and six to fifteen more times likely to go blind from the disease than other ethnic groups.
- African-Americans show signs of glaucoma starting at age 35. Other groups show signs after age 40. Caucasians, age 50 and older, are also at an increased risk of developing glaucoma.
- Since January 1, 2002, Medicare includes an annual glaucoma screening benefit. There are specific guidelines you must meet to qualify.



## GLAUCOMA: DETECTION AND PREVENTION

Glaucoma is a major cause of blindness in America. Early detection is important to control the disease and limit its harmful effects. It is important to maintain regular dilated eye check ups with your doctor. *This information has been provided by Prevent Blindness America. Copyright 2003* For more information please contact them at (800) 331-2020 or log on to their web site at [www.preventblindness.org](http://www.preventblindness.org).