

## **Glaucoma**

### **What is glaucoma?**

Glaucoma is one of the leading causes of irreversible blindness in the world. Fluid produced in the eye normally is called aqueous humour. When too much fluid is produced, the pressure in the eye increases. A certain amount of pressure is normal in the eye, but in a glaucoma patient, the pressure causes damage to the nerve in the back of the eye which connects the eye and the brain. That pressure kills the nerve and steals away the vision first on the edges or the periphery and not until the very end does it take away the vision for straight ahead. For this reason it is sometimes called a “thief in the night.” Early detection and treatment is essential to prevent vision loss. In order to know if you have glaucoma, you need to undergo a comprehensive dilated examination including a check of the pressure, a careful high magnification view of the optic nerve and possibly visual field testing.

There are two main forms of glaucoma. In open angle glaucoma too much fluid is produced in the eye and it cannot drain out quickly enough so that the pressure builds slowly and to moderately high levels. This is the most common form of glaucoma. Closed angle glaucoma, on the other hand, means that the normal drain in the eye becomes plugged up and the pressure in the eye quickly becomes extremely high. In this situation the individual is typically very uncomfortable and has complaints of severe pain, redness, headache, and nausea. This is a medical emergency and a new drain needs to be put in the eye, usually performed with a laser treatment. Prevention of closed angle attacks is another important reason for comprehensive eye examinations.

### **What are the risk factors for glaucoma?**

The older that you are, the more likely it is that you develop glaucoma. Other risks factors include family history, higher amounts of nearsightedness or farsightedness, Hispanic, African or Asian ancestry, diabetes, thin corneas, history of serious eye trauma and low blood pressure

### **How is glaucoma treated?**

Open angle glaucoma is usually treated first with eye drops. Laser procedures and surgery may also be helpful. Closed angle glaucoma always require a surgical procedure either open surgery or more commonly performed with a laser.

### **Glaucoma can usually be controlled.**

One of the few absolutes in medicine is found with glaucoma. When treated, vision loss can usually be avoided if diagnosed and treated early. Untreated, most will go blind untreated.