

Rehab News



Submitted By: Therapy Department at Healthcare Therapy Services, Inc.

National Glaucoma Month

Glaucoma and How It Affects Vision

Glaucoma is caused by high intraocular pressure (high pressure of fluid inside the eye) and can decrease vision without warning. Glaucoma is one of the most common illnesses affecting the optic nerve. The optic nerve's job is to transfer visual information to the brain, so when high intraocular pressure occurs, the optic nerve compresses, causing cells to die and vision to permanently decline.

Did You Know?
Over 3 million Americans have glaucoma but only half know they have it. Glaucoma can cause blindness if left untreated.

Diagnosing Glaucoma

Glaucoma is known as "the sneak thief of sight" because there are virtually no symptoms before vision loss occurs. Regular eye exams are the best way to protect your eyesight from glaucoma and other diseases affecting your eyes. Vision loss begins with peripheral (side vision) loss, so you may not notice anything until significant vision loss. Although there is not yet a cure for glaucoma, it can be treated through medication or surgery by stopping the progression if diagnosed.

Types of Glaucoma

There are many types of glaucoma, but the two main types are open-angle and angle-closure.

Open-Angle Glaucoma

The most common form of glaucoma (about 90%); caused by slow clogging of drainage canals, resulting in increased eye pressure; has symptoms and damage that may go unnoticed; lifelong condition

Angle-Closure Glaucoma

Caused by blocked drainage canals, resulting in sudden rise in intraocular pressure; demands immediate medical attention; has symptoms that are usually very noticeable

Who Does Glaucoma Affect?

Glaucoma can affect people of all ages, but most commonly affects middle-aged and older adults. It tends to be inherited, so knowing your family medical history is important. Other risk factors that put individuals at higher risk include: diabetes, nearsightedness, previous eye injury, extremely high or low blood pressure, and regular, long-term steroid/cortisone usage.

How Can Therapy Help?

Occupational Therapists (OTs) and Occupational Therapy Assistants (COTAs) play a significant role in helping individuals with low vision (resulting from glaucoma and other eye issues). Occupational therapy for someone with low vision may include altering daily tasks, assisting with eye drops and other medications, removing/altering safety hazards in the home, etc. to help maintain their independence. If you or someone you know has low vision, ask your doctor if therapy could benefit you.