

## OPHTHALMOLOGY

### Active Intervention Key to Saving Sight

Being proactive in seeking information is the best way to manage glaucoma – the silent thief of sight. Getting treated early is your best form of insurance since this disease leads to irreversible blindness.



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It is estimated that glaucoma is responsible for 40% of blindness in Singapore, yet many more people may be living with that condition. The only way to control glaucoma is through medical treatment as any damage to the eye is irreversible.

#### What is Glaucoma?

Glaucoma is a condition that affects sight and is usually caused by a build-up of pressure within the eye. In the eyeball, there is fluid called 'aqueous humour' that is constantly produced. When fluid is overproduced or the drainage system doesn't work properly, the fluid can't flow out at its normal rate and pressure builds up. This results in damage to the eye nerve.

The most common type of glaucoma is primary open-angle glaucoma and it tends to affect the middle-aged and the elderly. The trouble with primary open-angle glaucoma is that it tends to develop slowly, without noticeable sight loss for many years. This is because the initial vision loss usually occurs in peripheral vision; as such, visual acuity is often maintained until quite late in the disease.

The best way to deal with primary open-angle glaucoma that understand your family eye health as the condition has a strong hereditary link. If any of your family members or relatives have glaucoma, do ensure that you start factoring eye examinations into your screening routine. Early diagnosis is critical as glaucoma is a progressive eye disease that can cause irreparable damage to your optic nerve if left undiagnosed.

Also, if you suffer from



diabetes, high blood pressure or severe myopia, you should get yourself tested. Anyone over the age of 60 is at the highest risk of developing glaucoma.

Another form of glaucoma is angle-closure glaucoma; it is much rarer and is very different from open-angle glaucoma in that the eye pressure usually rises very quickly resulting in pain. The outer edge of the iris bunches up over drainage canals when the pupil enlarges. This can happen when you are entering a dark room.

Symptoms may include hazy or blurred vision, rainbow-coloured circles appearing around bright lights, severe head pain, nausea and sudden loss of vision. This form of glaucoma tends to affect the elderly and middle-aged Chinese women.

A less well-known category of glaucoma is childhood glaucoma.

Symptoms include a gradual onset of light sensitivity, corneal opacification (where the cornea starts to turn hazy grey), enlarged cornea, epiphora (overflow of tears) and vision loss.

#### Tackling Glaucoma

Although glaucoma cannot be cured, it can be successfully controlled in most cases. The mode of treatment depends on the type and severity of glaucoma, but some common treatment methods include medication (in the form of eye drops), laser therapy or surgery.

The most important thing is to have your condition diagnosed early as the longer one waits to get treatment, the more difficult it will be to treat the condition, and the more severe the loss of vision would eventually become. [👁️](#)