

Consumer Health: Treating glaucoma

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January is National Glaucoma Awareness Month, which makes this a good time to learn more about treating this group of eye conditions.

About 3 million people in the U.S. have glaucoma, and it's the second leading cause of blindness worldwide, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Glaucoma is a group of eye conditions that damage the optic nerve, often due to abnormally [high pressure](#) in your eye. Elevated eye [pressure](#) is due to a buildup of the fluid that flows throughout the inside of your eye. When this fluid is overproduced or the drainage system doesn't work properly, the fluid can't flow out at its normal rate and eye pressure increases.

Glaucoma is one of the leading causes of blindness for people over 60. It can occur at any age, but it is more common in older adults. The effect is so gradual that you may not notice a change in vision until the condition is at an [advanced stage](#). Many forms of glaucoma have no warning signs.

Because you can't recover [vision loss](#) due to glaucoma, it's important to have regular eye exams that measure your eye pressure. These exams can diagnose the condition in its early stages, when treatment can slow or prevent vision loss.

Glaucoma is treated by lowering your eye pressure, or intraocular pressure. Depending on your situation, your [treatment options](#) may include prescription eyedrops, oral medications, laser treatment, surgery or a combination of any of these.

Lifestyle strategies to control high eye pressure and promote eye health include:

- Eat a healthy diet. While eating a [healthy diet](#) won't prevent glaucoma from worsening, several vitamins and nutrients are important to eye health, including zinc; copper; selenium; and the antioxidant vitamins A, C and E.
- Exercise safely. Regular exercise may reduce eye pressure in open-angle glaucoma. Talk to your [health care provider](#) about an appropriate exercise program.

- Limit your caffeine. Drinking beverages with large amounts of caffeine may increase your eye pressure.
- Sip fluids frequently. Drink only moderate amounts of fluids at any given time during the course of a day. Drinking a quart or more of any liquid within a short time may temporarily increase eye pressure.
- Sleep with your head elevated. Using a wedge pillow that keeps your head slightly raised at about 20 degrees has been shown to reduce intraocular pressure while you sleep.
- Take prescribed medicine. Using your eyedrops or other medications as prescribed can help you get the best possible result from your treatment. Be sure to use the drops exactly as prescribed. Otherwise, your [optic nerve](#) damage could worsen.

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