

Glaucoma Questions and Answers

What is glaucoma?

Glaucoma is a group of eye diseases in which the pressure inside the eye causes damage to the nerve of sight (optic nerve), leading to vision loss – or even blindness.

How serious a problem is glaucoma in New Zealand?

It is very serious. It is estimated that approximately 68,000 New Zealanders over the age of 40 currently have glaucoma and as many as half of those don't know they have it.

How can anyone tell if they have glaucoma?

Most often you cannot tell until it is too late, as glaucoma damage occurs progressively over a long period of time – hence why glaucoma is known as the 'silent thief of sight'.

If you are concerned in any way about your sight e.g. have trouble finding a line of print, bump into things or notice a variation in colour richness from time to time, please go and have an eye examination as this may be a predictor of glaucoma.

Does glaucoma run in families?

Not everyone with a family history of glaucoma will get it, but the risk is increased 5-10 fold if a close relative has it. Those with a brother or sister, mother or father with glaucoma have an even higher risk. This is why it is so important for anyone in this group to have their eyes checked frequently.

Is anyone else at risk of developing glaucoma?

Those with short sightedness (myopia), high blood pressure or thyroid disease have a higher risk of developing glaucoma. An eye injury may also increase your risk.

Why is the '45 plus 5' Glaucoma Eye Examination so important?

Glaucoma NZ urges everyone to have an eye examination for glaucoma by the age of 45, every 5 years after that until the age of 60, and three yearly after 60. If everyone did this, most glaucoma would be detected early, treatment commenced and the rate of blindness would drop dramatically.

Who does eye examinations/glaucoma checks?

You can go directly to an optometrist for a consultation, eye examination and glaucoma check. This will usually take about 45 minutes.

What harm does high pressure cause to an eye?

Unless high pressure in the eye is controlled, it may cause damage to the optic nerve which is at the back of the eye. The optic nerve is the weakest and most delicate structure of the eye.

If glaucoma has no symptoms, why does it need to be treated?

Vision loss from glaucoma is irreversible therefore glaucoma needs to be treated to prevent potential loss of vision before symptoms develop. Glaucoma treatment is aimed at lowering the pressure in the eye. This will not restore lost vision; only halt progression and preserve the sight that is left.

What are the ways glaucoma can be treated?

Glaucoma can be treated with eye drops, pills, laser surgery, eye operations or a combination of methods.

Is glaucoma curable?

Glaucoma is not curable. If you have glaucoma you must be monitored for the rest of your life.

Who is Glaucoma New Zealand?

Established in 2002, Glaucoma NZ is a registered charitable trust charged with the mission of using its resources to eliminate blindness from glaucoma. GNZ receives no government funding relying solely on donations, sponsorship, grants and fundraising.

Remember

Glaucoma cannot be cured; it can be controlled if it is detected early and treated.