

# January is Glaucoma Awareness Month

Most people consider vision to be their most valuable sense, however, not everyone gets regular eye exams to allow doctors to diagnose and treat any problems early. How often you should have your eyes examined depends on the state of your vision, your age, and whether you have chronic medical conditions like diabetes, which may put you at risk for eye problems in the future. Your doctor can recommend how often you should get your eyes checked depending on your medical history.

Most common eye conditions can be treated if they are detected early enough. Glaucoma is the leading cause of blindness in the United States, but early detection and treatment can preserve your vision. Family history is probably the number one risk factor for glaucoma. It is often referred to as the “sneak thief of sight,” because people do not usually notice any symptoms until they have already lost a significant amount of vision. Once vision is lost, it cannot be restored.

Glaucoma is an eye disease that results in loss of sight by damaging a part of the eye called the optic nerve. The optic nerve sends information from your eyes to your brain. When glaucoma damages your optic nerve, you start to lose certain areas of vision, usually side vision (peripheral vision). Over time, glaucoma may also damage straight ahead (central) vision. Unfortunately, you may not notice a loss of side vision until you have lost a great deal of your sight. When checking for glaucoma, eye doctors usually check your eye pressure and look for damage to the optic nerve and any loss of side vision.

Glaucoma is often treated with medicine (eye drops), laser surgery, glaucoma surgery or a combination of these treatments. Eye drops are typically the first step in treatment, but laser surgery may also be just as effective as a first choice. Your individual treatment plan is determined by you and your doctor.

The best way to preserve your vision and detect any eye conditions before they result in vision loss is to get regular vision checkups. Health experts recommend people over 40 to have their eyes checked a minimum of every two years, regardless if they wear glasses or contacts. People 65 and older should have an annual eye exam as the risk of glaucoma increases with age.

Source: [www.preventblindness.org](http://www.preventblindness.org)

