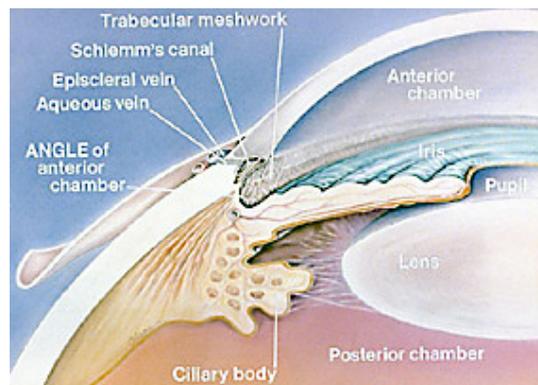


Fact Sheet

Primary Open Angle Glaucoma

Glaucoma is not just one disease, but a group of eye diseases. The common feature of these diseases is a characteristic damage to the optic nerve; the nerve that connects the eye to the brain. This damage is at least partly due to the pressure inside the eyeball reaching levels that are too high for the eye to tolerate.



Primary open angle glaucoma is the most common form of glaucoma. It happens when the eye's drainage canals become clogged over time or the tissues around the canals harden. This results in the pressure in the eye increasing because the fluid cannot drain out of the eye. With open angle glaucoma the entrances to the drainage canals are clear and should be working correctly. The clogging problem occurs inside the drainage canals, like the clogging that can occur inside the pipe below the drain in a sink.

Most people have no symptoms and no early warning signs. If open angle glaucoma is not diagnosed and treated, it can cause a gradual loss of vision. This type of glaucoma develops slowly and sometimes without noticeable sight loss for many years. Blind spots usually develop first in the peripheral or side vision. If left untreated, glaucoma may lead to blindness in both eyes.

Primary open angle glaucoma can only be diagnosed after your eye doctor has done a thorough examination, one that will also exclude other abnormalities of the eye.

Risk factors for the development of primary open angle glaucoma include:

1. Age - the older we get the greater the risk of getting glaucoma.
2. Family History - people who have a family history of glaucoma are 3 -10 times more likely to develop glaucoma themselves.
3. Race - some races such as African-Americans are at higher risk for glaucoma.
4. Intraocular Pressure - the higher the pressure in the eye the greater the risk of glaucoma.

Primary open angle glaucoma usually responds well to treatment. Once the diagnosis is made, long-term follow-up with your eye doctor and regular visits are required. But blindness from glaucoma is preventable with early detection and effective treatment.