**Lifestyle Choices May Help Glaucoma Patients Preserve EyeSight**

Glaucoma is one of the leading causes of vision loss, affecting about 3 million people in the United States. Because there are no symptoms early on, about half of people with the disease don’t know they have it. Once vision is lost to glaucoma, it can’t be regained. During Glaucoma Awareness Month in January, [INSERT ORGANIZATION NAME] joins the [American Academy of Ophthalmology](https://www.aao.org/) in reminding the public that early detection and treatment, and some lifestyle choices can help protect your sight

Glaucoma damages the optic nerve, which transmits visual information from the retina to the brain. Typically, the disease progresses slowly, gradually destroying peripheral vision. Because people are unaware of early peripheral vision loss, a patient can lose most of it before they even know they have glaucoma.

That’s why the Academy recommends that everyone have a [comprehensive](https://www.aao.org/eye-health/tips-prevention/eye-exams-101) eye exam at age 40. This exam provides ophthalmologists – physicians who specialize in medical and surgical eye care – an opportunity to carefully examine the eye including the optic nerve for signs of damage and other possible problems that may affect vision. Individuals at greater risk for developing glaucoma include people:

* over age 40;
* of African, Asian or Hispanic heritage;
* who have [high eye pressure](https://www.aao.org/eye-health/anatomy/eye-pressure) detected during an eye exam;
* who are [farsighted](https://www.aao.org/eye-health/diseases/hyperopia-farsightedness) or [nearsighted](https://www.aao.org/eye-health/diseases/myopia-nearsightedness);
* who have experienced eye trauma or eye injury;
* whose [corneas](https://www.aao.org/eye-health/anatomy/cornea-103) are thin in the center;
* or who have health problems such as [diabetes](https://www.aao.org/eye-health/diseases/diabetic-eye-disease), [migraines](https://www.aao.org/eye-health/diseases/what-is-migraine), [high blood pressure](https://www.aao.org/eye-health/anatomy/blood-pressure) or poor blood circulation.

Appropriate treatment for glaucoma depends on the specific type and severity of the disease. Medicated [eye drops](https://www.aao.org/eye-health/treatments/eye-drops-kinds-recommendations) or laser treatments are the most common initial approach. These techniques work by lowering eye pressure to reduce the amount of [fluid in the eye](https://www.aao.org/eye-health/anatomy/aqueous-humor), and by increasing fluid outflow from the eye.

Beyond drugs and surgery, several recent studies suggest that lifestyle choices may also help minimize the risk of losing vision to glaucoma.

**Exercise regularly.** A [study](https://www.aaojournal.org/article/S0161-6420(18)30792-9/abstract) just published in Ophthalmology, the journal of the American Academy of Ophthalmology, showed that people who engaged in physical activity can slow vision loss from glaucoma.

**Meditate.** A new [study](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/30256277) published last month in the Journal Glaucoma showed that a relaxation program with meditation can lower eye pressure in glaucoma patients and improve their quality of life by lowering stress hormones like cortisol.

**Don’t use CBD as a “natural” glaucoma remedy.** CBD, or cannabidiol, is the non-psychotropic component of cannabis and hemp being touted as a magical cure-all. A [study](https://iovs.arvojournals.org/article.aspx?articleid=2718702) published last month in Investigative Ophthalmology & Visual Science shows it actually raised eye pressure in mice.

**Eat a diet rich in fruits and vegetables, especially green, leafy ones**. One study showed that people who ate more leafy vegetables have a 20 to 30 percent lower risk of developing glaucoma. Why? Nitrates in green vegetables can be converted to nitric oxide, which can improve blood flow and help regulate pressure inside the eye.

**Don’t smoke**. Smoking cigarettes increases the risk of glaucoma and has an overall negative impact on eye health.

**Maintain a healthy body weight**. People with a higher body mass index (BMI) are at increased risk for diabetes, and having diabetes puts people at risk of glaucoma. Having a too low BMI is also associated with increased glaucoma risk.

“Patients are often surprised when their ophthalmologist tells them they have glaucoma because they don’t have symptoms,” said Dianna Seldomridge, M.D., a clinical spokesperson for the American Academy of Ophthalmology. “That’s why it’s so important to have your eyes examined regularly; to detect the signs of disease you don’t see. The good news is that today’s innovative treatments and surgical techniques are better than ever.”

[INSERT YOUR SPOKESPERSON’S QUOTE HERE]

To learn more ways to keep your eyes healthy, visit the American Academy of Ophthalmology’s [EyeSmart](https://www.aao.org/eye-health)® website.