



Glaucoma – the Sight Robber

BY DR. THOMAS P. FINLEY, Optometrist

Glaucoma is an eye disease that can steal your sight.

It is the second leading cause of blindness in the United States and the first leading cause of preventable blindness. Glaucoma affects an estimated 3 million Americans, with 120,000 blind due to the condition. It is a sneaky disease because in many cases, there are no early warning signs. Vision stays normal and there is no pain. You may have glaucoma and not even know it.

What exactly happens in glaucoma? It is a complicated disease, but very simply, the front cavity of the eye is filled with a fluid called the aqueous. This fluid is constantly coming into the eye and constantly leaving the eye at the same rate. In glaucoma, something is disrupted where too much fluid is being produced or not enough fluid escapes. The additional fluid causes increased pressure to the inside of the eye, and specifically the small blood vessels or capillaries. These capillaries get pinched closed so blood and oxygen can not pass through to nourish the retinal fibers in the eye. The fibers become damaged, and in most cases, this damage is permanent. Peripheral vision tends to be affected first, so the early loss in vision oftentimes goes unnoticed.

The best way to guard against the blinding effects of glaucoma is to have a thorough eye examination with your pupils dilated. Your doctor will perform a variety of tests to measure your eye pressure and carefully assess the health of the optic nerve in the back of your eye. Additional

tests such as threshold visual fields, OCT nerve fiber analysis, examination of the drainage area of the eye, corneal thickness, Visual Evoked Potential of the optic nerve, etc., should also be performed if there is a suspicion of the disease. Diagnosing glaucoma requires careful study of information from various tests. Make certain your doctor has invested in the required instrumentation. If glaucoma is detected early and treated promptly, it can usually be controlled with little or no further vision loss.

Glaucoma Screenings are often offered at local health fairs. This usually involves a basic measurement of your eye pressure with an instrument called the non contact tonometer (air puff machine). This is a valuable measurement but could be a little misleading. People can have a normal eye pressure reading but still have glaucoma. The eye pressures fluctuate (increase and decrease) throughout the day in everyone. Take advantage of the screening, but remember a comprehensive eye examination is still your best safeguard.

Glaucoma can occur in people of all ages, but is more common in:

- African Americans,
- Hispanics,
- People over the age of 40,
- People who have a family history of glaucoma,
- People with diabetes,
- People who are very nearsighted or myopic.

Yearly comprehensive eye examinations are extremely important for these individuals.

Glaucoma is usually treated and controlled with eyedrops. These drugs are designed to reduce pressure by slowing the production and flow of fluid into the eye while others may help improve fluid draining from the eye. For most people, regular use of medications will control the increased pressure. However, these drugs may stop working over time or they may cause side effects. If any of these problems occur, your eye doctor may select other drugs, change the dose, or suggest surgery to correct the problem.

Since glaucoma is a disease that needs to be managed and controlled for the rest of a person's life, it is important you feel comfortable and confident with your eye doctor. Make certain your doctor is knowledgeable about glaucoma, has the needed state-of-the-art instrumentation to monitor your progress, and takes the time to explain everything to you. Optometrists and ophthalmologists are both licensed to manage glaucoma. Make certain you receive the care you deserve.



Dr. Thomas P. Finley received his Bachelor of Science degree from St. Francis University in Pennsylvania, and his Doctorate of Optometry from the Pennsylvania College of Optometry. Following graduation, he served as an optometry officer in the United States Air Force and was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal and the Commendation Medal.

Dr. Finley has served as an adjunct clinical professor for three optometry schools, and has been a clinical investigator for two major contact lens companies. He has published several articles in professional and trade journals and local newspapers and has also lectured at educational conferences.

Dr. Finley is a Fellow of the American Academy of Optometry, a Fellow of the Virginia Academy of Optometry, and a member of the American Optometric Association, Virginia Optometric Association, and Northern Virginia Optometric Society. He is an Advisory Board member for TLC Laser Eye Centers.

Locally, Dr. Finley serves as an active member of the Herndon Rotary Club (past president), Chamber of Commerce (past board member), Optimist Club (youth sports' coach), and Knights of Columbus (past board member). He serves on the board of the Jeanie Schmidt Free Clinic. He was awarded Herndon's "Distinguished Service Award," the Chamber of Commerce's "Small Business of the Year Award," and The Times Newspapers "Best Eye Doctor Award." He has owned his Herndon optometry practice since 1989.

Dr. Finley was recently recognized by the Virginia Optometric Association as Distinguished Optometrist of the Year.

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