



**Associate Professor Paul Chew,
Chief and Senior Consultant,
Department of Ophthalmology, shares
some insights on glaucoma, which
women above 55 years should take note.**

Glaucoma

Singapore Women Are At Risk

Qs: What is the prevalence of glaucoma in Singapore?

Ans: Glaucoma is a common eye disease in Singapore. About 3.2% of the population suffers from this. Termed as the 'silent blindness', there are still many who are not aware of this disease and its symptoms. Most people only realise that they are suffering from glaucoma when the condition becomes undesirable.

Qs: Who are at risk of getting this disease?

Ans: The eye disease is not limited to any gender, age or race, though typically, the disease is more commonly present in those 40 years of age and above. However, women between the age of 55 and 65 years are more prone to angle-closure glaucoma. There are also no immunities against this disease.

Qs: What are the symptoms of this disease?

Ans: Glaucoma does not display any initial symptoms. Patients may experience a halo effect with their side vision blurred or darkened. Only the central vision remains clear and focused. However, in acute cases, the symptoms displayed will include pain, redness and blurred vision in either one or both eyes, accompanied by nausea and vomiting.

Qs: Are there different forms of glaucoma?

Ans: Glaucoma can be commonly divided into two general types.

In chronic glaucoma, the patient does not experience acute pain or redness. Typically, his or her side vision will be affected first, with central vision maintained initially. The disease is often in a very advanced stage before visual loss is noted. This applies to both open and closed angle glaucoma.

Acute closed angle glaucoma occurs more commonly among the Chinese population in Singapore, especially among Chinese females between the age of 55 and 65 years. However, in comparison to the Europeans, the Malay and Indian population are also prone to getting the disease.

The disease is often characterised by a sudden increase in the eyeball pressure, causing sudden onset of pain, redness and blurred vision in one or both eyes. The pain can be very severe and is often accompanied by headache, nausea and vomiting. You would need to seek urgent medical attention in this case.

Qs: What are the treatment options?

Ans: Glaucoma is an irreversible eye disease that cannot be cured. The aim of the treatment is to lower the intraocular pressure to an acceptable level and prevent further damage to the optic nerves.

The treatment will depend on the type of glaucoma. It may be in the form of eyedrop medication prescribed by the doctor, surgery to relieve the pressure inside the eyeball, or laser treatment to create a channel inside the eye for fluid drainage and to prevent future attacks of glaucoma.

Qs: How effective is the treatment?

Ans: The series of treatment do not cure and free the patient of glaucoma but is necessary to keep the disease under control for the rest of the patient's life. Frequent follow-up checks with your doctor are an absolute must to help prevent further damage to the eye.

Qs: How can I prevent glaucoma?

Ans: There are no preventive measures for glaucoma but vision loss can be prevented if treatment is started before optic nerve damage has occurred.

Glaucoma can be hereditary and genetically linked. Thus, having regular eye check-ups, such as annual screening for angle-closure glaucoma*, will help immensely in the early detection of the disease and prevent further damage to your eyes.

* Available at NUH Eye Clinic



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