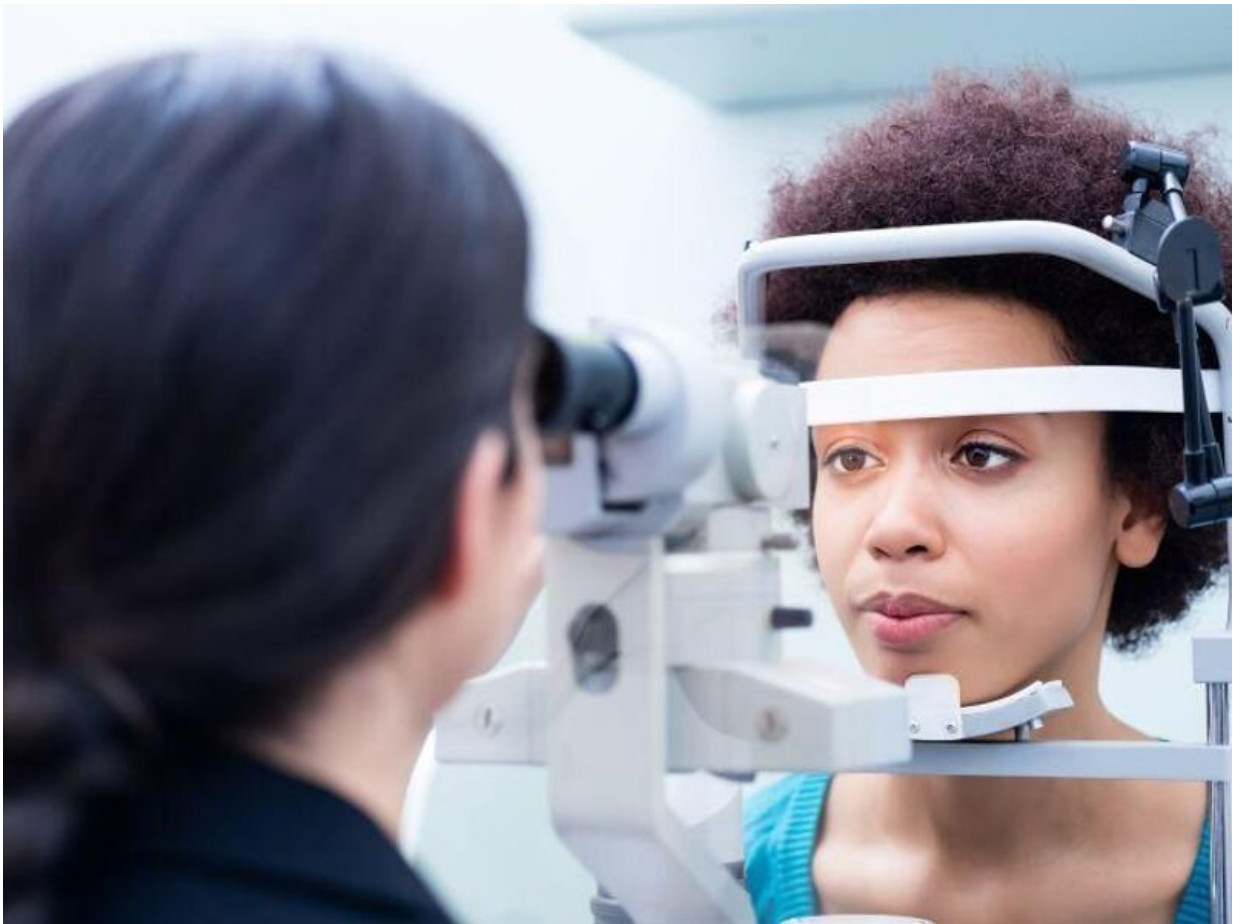


# What is glaucoma, and how can you prevent it?

January 4 2023, by Cara Murez HealthDay Reporter

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A comprehensive eye exam could be the key to determining if you have

glaucoma, a silent thief of sight.

Glaucoma is a group of eye diseases that affect the [optic nerve](#), and the leading cause of preventable blindness, according to The Glaucoma Foundation. But most people are unaware of their risk.

Glaucoma affects about 80 million people worldwide, and that number is expected to reach almost 112 million by 2040. The condition can run in families. It disproportionately affects people of color.

Most people are diagnosed after age 40, and at least half of [glaucoma](#) patients had no symptoms until their vision was already significantly damaged.

As many as 1.5 million Americans are unaware that glaucoma is silently damaging their [optic nerves](#) right now, according to the foundation.

High-[risk factors](#) for glaucoma include a family history of the disease and being over age 40. Having a family member with glaucoma doesn't necessarily mean you'll get the disease, however.

The most important risk factor is having abnormally [high intraocular pressure](#) (IOP), the foundation explained in a news release.

Being of African, Hispanic and Asian descent also increases the risk. People with African and Hispanic ancestry have a greater tendency for developing primary open-angle glaucoma. People of Asian ancestry are more apt to develop angle-closure glaucoma and normal-tension glaucoma.

Other risk factors include diabetes, nearsightedness, previous eye injury, extremely high or [low blood pressure](#), thin central corneas, and long-term use of steroids and cortisone.

The foundation urges everyone under age 40 to have a comprehensive eye exam every three to four years. Those with a risk factor and all folks over 40 should get their eyes checked every 18 to 24 months.

Glaucoma can't be cured, but can be managed if it is detected and treated early.

**More information:** The U.S. National Eye Institute has more on [glaucoma](#).

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