

Hypertension and Your Eyes: The Connection



Doctors use the term “hypertension” to describe the both general condition called high blood pressure as well as the specific condition called high intraocular pressure (IOP). Ocular hypertension is a condition where the pressure in your eyes, or your IOP, is too high. Continually high pressure within the eye can eventually damage the optic nerve and lead to glaucoma or permanent vision loss.



Some possible causes of ocular hypertension include:

- High blood pressure
- Stress
- Certain medications
- A diet with excess salt, hydrogenated oils, trans fats, red meat, alcohol, and sugar
- Eye trauma
- Smoking
- Diabetes
- Other eye conditions
- Heart disease

Other factors, such as age, race, and genetics, can also contribute to ocular hypertension. People over 40, African-Americans, and those with a family history of hypertension or glaucoma are at higher risk of having high IOP. Generally, women are more prone to develop hypertension than men, and men are more prone to develop glaucoma than women.

Ocular hypertension is a result of disruptions in the aqueous humour, the fluid substance that fills the anterior chamber of the eye and helps to keep the cornea functioning properly. If your eye produces too much aqueous or has trouble draining enough of it, your IOP will be high.

An eye doctor can detect high IOP and high blood pressure, in addition to other health conditions, during an eye exam just by looking at the blood vessels in the eye. Unfortunately, outside of getting an eye exam, there are usually no noticeable symptoms of ocular hypertension until it is too late to prevent damage. Without treatment, it can lead to bleeding in the eye, blurred vision, damage to the optic nerve, glaucoma, and vision loss.

If you find that your peripheral vision is becoming blurry, schedule a visit to your eye doctor immediately because this could be a sign of glaucoma. Although eye drops or prescription medications can't reverse the effects of glaucoma, they can prevent the damage from getting worse. They can also help prevent hypertension from turning into glaucoma.

There is no guaranteed way to prevent hypertension, but maintaining a healthy diet, exercising regularly, and visiting your eye doctor at least once a year are all smart ways to guard against hypertension and other eye conditions.

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