



# Marble Valley Eye Care

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## **GLAUCOMA IS A SNEAK!**

By John F. Coco, MD

Why should you have an eye exam? Glaucoma's one of the big reasons why. This disease is common, sneaky, and can permanently steal your vision.

As many as three million Americans have glaucoma, and many don't even know they have it. This disease damages peripheral or side vision in a gradual, sneaky way, usually over years, before you even know there's a problem. Glaucoma doesn't cause pain in most cases, and because it damages side vision years before straight-ahead vision, people tend to have no symptoms.

Glaucoma is a disease of the optic nerve, which carries vision from the eye to the brain, caused by pressure inside the eye which is high enough to harm nerve fibers and damage vision.

A complete eye exam includes a measurement of your eye pressure, as well as a detailed look at the optic nerve, through dilated pupils. The dilated exam of the nerve is every bit as important as the eye pressure measurement, as many people have nerve damage even in the face of seemingly normal pressures. If your eye doctor is suspicious that you might have glaucoma, you may be asked to do a visual field. This office test involves looking for dots of light on a computer screen, so that a detailed map of your central and peripheral vision can be mapped. The diagnosis is typically made, based on the measurement of pressure, optic nerve appearance, and visual field analysis.

So, if you do have glaucoma, what can be done? Most people with glaucoma are treated with various eye drops designed to lower eye pressure and thus prevent progression of the disease. Laser may also be used to lower pressure, and in a small number of cases, surgery may be required for pressure control. Although glaucoma is common, with treatment, most people can lead normal lives, without debilitating vision loss.

When was your last eye exam? Adults over 40 should have dilated exams every 2-4 years, and more often with each additional decade of life. Those with glaucoma risk factors, including high eye pressure, suspicious optic nerve appearance, and family history, may need more frequent assessments, as determined by their eye doctor.