

Driving When You Have Glaucoma

You have been a safe driver for years. For you, driving means freedom and control. As you get older, changes in your physical and mental health can affect how safely you drive.

Glaucoma is a group of eye diseases that are the leading cause of blindness in the United States. Millions of people have glaucoma, but half do not know it because the most common form (open-angle glaucoma) develops very slowly and often has no symptoms.

As the disease gets worse, glaucoma damages your optic nerve and causes blank spots in your field of vision. You may not notice these blank spots at first, but they will grow larger as the nerve becomes more damaged. Without proper treatment, the optic nerve will be destroyed, and you could become blind.

How Can Glaucoma Affect the Way I Drive?

- If glaucoma is untreated, you will slowly lose your peripheral (side) vision and will not be able to see things out of the corner of your eye.
- Your vision may be dull and blurry.
- You may not see the road, street signs, lane markers, and even people and bicyclists in the road.
- You may have a hard time seeing on a cloudy day, or while driving at sunrise, sunset, or at nighttime.
- The glare from bright sunlight and oncoming headlights may be hard to manage.

You may not realize your vision is much worse until the advanced stages of this disease. But, over time, you may feel as if you are looking through a tunnel.

What Should I Do If I Have Any of These Signs?

As soon as you notice any of these warning signs:

- Tell your family or someone close to you.
- See your eye health care provider.

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Early diagnosis of glaucoma is important. Medicines, such as eye drops or pills, are the most common treatments. Other treatments include laser or conventional surgery, or a combination of any of these.

What Can I Do If Glaucoma Affects My Driving Safety?

It is important to know how glaucoma is changing your driving safety. Your eye health care provider may suggest that you see a specialist to help you adjust to these changes.

Two types of specialists can help you:

- ***A driver rehabilitation specialist*** can test how well you drive on and off the road. This specialist also can help you decide when you need to stop driving. To find a driver rehabilitation specialist, go to www.aota.org/olderdriver. Under “Driving & Community Mobility,” click the button in the center of the page marked “Search for a Driver Rehabilitation Specialist.” This will link you to a national database. There you can search for names and addresses of local driver rehabilitation specialists.
- ***An occupational therapist with special training in driving skills assessment and remediation.*** To find an occupational therapist, contact local hospitals and rehabilitation centers.

What Can I Do If I Have to Limit or Stop Driving?

If you have glaucoma, you may still be able to drive safely, especially during the early stages. Work closely with your eye health care provider to manage your symptoms.

Even if you have to limit or give up driving, you can stay active and do the things you like to do.

First, plan ahead. Talk with family and friends about how you can shift from driver to passenger. Below are some ways to get where you want to go and see the people you want to see:

- Rides with family and friends.
- Taxis.
- Shuttle buses or vans.
- Public buses, trains, and subways.
- Walking.
- Para transit services (special transportation services for people with disabilities; some offer door-to-door service).

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Take someone with you. You may want to have a family member or friend go with you when you use public transportation or when you walk. Having someone with you can help you get where you want to go without confusion.

Find out about transportation services in your area. Many community-based volunteer programs offer free or low-cost transportation.

Where Can I Get Help With Transportation?

To find transportation services in your area, visit www.eldercare.gov or call the national ElderCare Locator at **800-677-1116**, and ask for your local Office on Aging.

If you have a disability, check out Easter Seals Project ACTION at www.projectaction.org or call **800-659-6428**. This project works with the transportation industry and the disability community to give people with disabilities more ways to get around.

Where Can I Learn More About Glaucoma?

First, talk with your eye health care provider.

For more information, contact:

- **AMERICAN ACADEMY OF OPHTHALMOLOGY:** www.aao.org, 415-447-0213
- **AMERICAN OPTOMETRIC ASSOCIATION:** www.aoa.org, 800-365-221
- **GLAUCOMA FOUNDATION:** www.glaucomafoundation.org, 212-285-0080
- **NATIONAL EYE INSTITUTE**, National Institutes of Health: www.nei.nih.gov, 301-496-5248
- **NATIONAL LIBRARY OF MEDICINE**, National Institutes of Health: www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/glaucoma.html
- To order a free copy of *Age Page on Older Drivers*, call the National Institute on Aging, 800-222-2225, or go to www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/older-drivers.
- **NATIONAL HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SAFETY ADMINISTRATION:** www.nhtsa.gov, 888-327-4236

**Always Wear Your Seat Belt.
Do Not Use Your Cell Phone While Driving.**