

## Ophthalmology – Chronic Visual Loss: The Importance of Screening for Open Angle Glaucoma

### Whiteboard Animation Transcript

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One condition that can cause chronic visual loss that you cannot afford to miss is chronic open angle glaucoma. **If chronic open angle glaucoma is missed, your patient can go blind.**

Unlike patients with angle closure glaucoma, who classically present with a painful red eye with nausea and vomiting, **patients with open angle glaucoma are asymptomatic.** This is a very common condition which affects nearly 3 percent of the population.

Patients with chronic open angle glaucoma develop high pressures in the eye when the drainage system in the eye – known as the trabecular meshwork – degenerates and becomes obstructed. As the disease progresses patients may develop peripheral visual loss on visual field testing and at its end stage central vision can also be lost. Unfortunately, **50% of patients have advanced disease at the time of diagnosis.** This is why it is so critical for at-risk patients to be screened every 1-2 years. To be considered “at risk” patients would need to have more than one of the following **risk factors:**

- Age over 80
- Being nearsighted
- Having high blood pressure and diabetes
- Having a positive family history
- And those of African-American ancestry

#### **Clinical signs of open angle glaucoma include:**

- A cup-to-disc ratio greater than 0.5
- Cup-disc asymmetry between the two eyes
- The presence of a disc hemorrhage, and
- An eye pressure that is greater than 21 millimetres of mercury.

Because of its high prevalence, it is important that **even those that are not at-risk but are over the age of 45 be periodically screened for glaucoma,** typically every 2 to 4 years. **At age 65 and older, all patients should have annual eye assessments** to screen for glaucoma and other eye diseases.

## References

Weinreb RN, Khaw PT. Primary open-angle glaucoma. *The Lancet*. 2004;363(9422):1711-20.