

of these conditions can help you protect your vision and that of an aging loved one.

**Glaucoma** occurs when the pressure within the eye is elevated, which can damage the optic nerve and result in vision loss and blindness. There usually are no initial symptoms, so as many as one million people may have glaucoma without realizing it. This condition is one of the main causes of blindness in the United States.

At first, glaucoma yields no obvious symptoms. However, as the disease progresses, a person with glaucoma may notice their side or peripheral vision gradually failing. Sufferers may experience worsening tunnel vision if left untreated.

There are many different types of medications (in eye drop and pill form) that are used to treat glaucoma. In some people, however, medications alone do not successfully control increased eye pressure, and surgery needs to be performed. One type of surgery called trabeculoplasty uses a laser to improve the flow of fluids out of the eye, thereby reducing pressure. This can be done in your doctor's office. There is also conventional surgery called trabeculectomy in which your doctor creates a new drainage path in the eye, under the eyelid.

Risk factors for glaucoma include age, family history of glaucoma, the use of steroid medications and near-sightedness.

**Cataract** is a clouding of the eye's usually transparent lens. The lens is composed of water and protein, but if the protein clumps together, it can start to obscure transmission of light through the lens. If the cataract worsens and begins to severely affect vision, surgery may be necessary to remove the cloudy lens and replace it with a new one.

People with cataracts often complain about glare, cloudy/fuzzy vision, double vision in one

eye or halos around lights. Surgery is the only way to correct vision loss caused by cataracts.

Getting older is a major risk factor for cataracts, and women are at slightly higher risk than men. People who smoke, do not protect their eyes from the sun and have a family history of cataracts are more likely to develop them as well.

**Macular Degeneration (MD)** diminishes sight in a dramatic way: It affects one's central vision. Although people with MD rarely go completely blind because of it, many find it difficult to read, drive and perform other daily functions. This condition affects the macula, an area at the center of the retina that is responsible for focused, central vision.

In the early stages of MD, there are usually no visual symptoms. A person's central vision will eventually appear wavy or blurry, and in advanced cases it may disappear completely. However, peripheral vision usually remains intact because the rest of the retina is still healthy. Even with some remaining vision, it can still be difficult for those with MD to detect fine details and colors.

MD is considered an incurable eye disease, but there are a few treatments that can help slow its progression. People with macular degeneration can be treated with laser surgery and anti-angiogenic drug injections. Low-vision devices are also helpful for maintaining an active and independent lifestyle in spite of visual changes.

Age is the biggest risk factor for developing MD. It is estimated that 6.5 percent of Americans age 40 and older have some degree of macular degeneration. Family history, race (whites appear to have a higher risk than blacks or Hispanics), high blood pressure and smoking are other risk factors.

**Diabetic Retinopathy**, a potentially blinding disorder, is a complication of diabetes.