- Vision disorders

Glaucoma and eye care

Protecting your sight for life

The Fiji Times · 30 Jul 2025 · 17 · By DR PASSANG BHUTIA Left: One of the challenges with glaucoma is that symptoms often do not appear until advanced stages.

GLAUCOMA is often referred to as the “silent thief of sight”—and for good reason. This group of eye conditions gradually damages the optic nerve, which is crucial for vision.

What makes glaucoma particularly dangerous is that it typically progresses without warning signs until signiNcant, often irreversible, vision loss has occurred.

Globally, glaucoma is one of the leading causes of blindness, affecting over 76 million people. Despite its prevalence, awareness remains low, especially in developing communities.

The good news is that with early detection and proper eye care, vision loss from glaucoma can often be prevented or minimised.

What is glaucoma?

Glaucoma refers to a group of diseases that damage the optic nerve, usually due to increased pressure inside the eye — known as intraocular pressure (IOP). This pressure builds when ɳuid in the eye (aqueous humor) does not drain properly.

Over time, elevated IOP can harm the optic nerve, which transmits visual signals from the eye to the brain.

There are several types of glaucoma, but the two most common are:

❏ Primary Open-Angle Glaucoma (POAG): The most prevalent type. It develops slowly over time and often has no symptoms until vision loss has occurred.

❏ Angle-Closure Glaucoma: A less common but more acute form that occurs when the drainage angle in the eye becomes blocked, causing a rapid rise in eye pressure and requiring immediate medical attention.

Signs and symptoms

One of the challenges with glaucoma is that symptoms often do not appear until advanced stages. However, some signs that may occur include:

❏ Gradual loss of peripheral (side) vision
❏ Tunnel vision in advanced stages
❏ Eye pain or redness (especially in acute cases)
❏ Halos around lights
❏ Blurred vision
❏ Sudden vision loss (in angleclosure glaucoma)

Who is at risk?

Anyone can develop glaucoma, but certain factors increase the risk, including:

❏ Age over 40
❏ Family history of glaucoma ❏ Diabetes or hypertension
❏ High intraocular pressure

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❏ Prolonged steroid use
❏ Ethnic background (African, Asian, and PaciNc Islander populations are at higher risk)
Importance of early detection
Since glaucoma can progress without symptoms, regular eye check-ups are critical — especially for those at higher risk. During an eye exam, an optometrist or ophthalmologist will:
❏ Measure eye pressure
❏ Inspect the drainage angle
❏ Examine the optic nerve
❏ Test peripheral vision
❏ Perform imaging to assess the structure of the eye
Annual or biannual eye exams can help detect early signs of glaucoma, allowing treatment to begin before vision is signiNcantly affected.
Managing glaucoma
While there is no cure for glaucoma, its progression can be managed. Common treatments include: ❏ Eye drops: Often the Nrst line of treatment to lower eye pressure.
❏ Oral medications: In some cases, tablets may be used alongside drops.
❏ Laser therapy: Procedures like laser trabeculoplasty help improve ηuid drainage.
❏ Surgery: When other treatments fail, surgeries such as trabeculectomy or drainage implants are used to control eye pressure.
It is vital for patients to adhere to their treatment plans and attend regular follow-up appointments to monitor eye pressure