

# Steroid Response Glaucoma

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This material will help you understand the basics of glaucoma and how you can manage your steroid response glaucoma.

## **What is glaucoma?**

Glaucoma is a group of eye diseases that cause damage to the optic nerve. It slowly causes the optic nerve to die over time. The optic nerve is the electric cable that sends images from the eye to the brain so we can see. Eye pressure can play a role in damaging the sensitive nerve fibers that make up the optic nerve. The amount of eye pressure that can cause nerve damage is different in each person. So someone with low eye pressure can still have nerve damage from glaucoma, it just means that their pressure is too high for their eye. If glaucoma is not treated, it will cause side-vision loss. This vision loss is permanent.

In some cases, other diseases cause glaucoma. This is known as secondary glaucoma. Secondary glaucoma can occur due to things like eye injuries, advanced cases of diabetes, or in this case, steroid medication.

Glaucoma is a leading cause of blindness, especially in older people. Early detection and treatment by your eye doctor are the keys to preventing vision loss from glaucoma.

## **What is steroid response glaucoma?**

Steroid response glaucoma occurs when a person who is more likely to develop this type of glaucoma takes steroid medications. Most people who use steroid medications to treat inflammation in the eye, or diseases like rheumatoid arthritis or asthma, do not develop steroid response glaucoma.

Unfortunately, we do not know who will develop this type of glaucoma and steroid medications are very important in treating inflammatory diseases. So, it is still important to take steroid medications if your doctor feels you cannot safely stop them. You will just have to have the eye doctor manage your steroid response glaucoma.

Steroids can damage the drain of the eye and cause it to drain the fluid inside the eye more slowly. This leads to increased pressure inside the eye. The increased pressure can damage the optic nerve and cause a loss of side vision, which we call glaucoma.

### **Do I have symptoms of glaucoma?**

Most glaucoma cases do not have noticeable symptoms. Your eye doctor monitors your glaucoma even when you have no symptoms. To do this, s/he checks your visual field and sees how your optic nerve looks.

Your doctor may measure your side vision by giving you a visual field test. During this test, you are asked if you can see a range of small flashing lights. This lets the doctor know if you have any signs of worsening side vision loss. Your doctor will also use a special lens to evaluate your optic nerve, sometimes by dilating your pupil.

If your doctor notices that your visual field is getting worse or your optic nerve looks worse, s/he will discuss adding more treatments for your glaucoma.

If you have sudden vision loss, with or without any of the following signs, contact your doctor immediately as your eye pressure may be very high:

- Severe brow ache around your eye
- Nausea
- Vomiting

## **How is steroid response glaucoma treated?**

The best way to treat steroid response glaucoma is to lower the eye pressure. Eye drops, laser treatments and surgery can help to lower eye pressure. Oral medications may also be prescribed. Your doctor will discuss which treatment option is best for you.

## **When do I use eye drops?**

If you need to take eye drops to stay in control of your glaucoma, it is very important that you take your eye drop medications on schedule every day. The eye pressure lowering effect of the medication wears off throughout the day. If you do not take your medications on schedule, your eye pressure will spike even though you cannot feel it. If you miss your drop, take it as soon as you remember as “it’s better late than never,” and you cannot “overdose” on your eye drops. Taking it closer to your next scheduled dose is not best, but it is better than not taking it at all.

## **How do I insert eye drops?**

Many people find it easiest to put in their eye drops in front of a mirror. To insert eye drops into your eyes, follow these steps:

1. Before using your eye drops, wash your hands.
2. Remove the cap. Do not touch the tip of the bottle.
3. Slightly tilt your head back.
4. Pull your lower eyelid down with your index finger to make a “pocket” with your lower lid, as seen in Picture 1.
5. Hold the tip of the bottle directly over this “pocket”.
6. While looking up, let the eye drop fall into the “pocket”. (Do not touch the bottle to your eye or eyelid.)
7. Close your eyes.



8. Using your finger, apply pressure where the lids meet the nose with your eyes closed, as seen in Picture 2. Hold the pressure for 1-3 minutes. This step is very important – to make sure your eye gets the correct amount of medication.
9. Wipe any extra drops and tears from the closed lids or cheek with a tissue, as seen in Picture 3.
10. Open your eyes.



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Wait at least five minutes before inserting any other kind of eye medication so that you are not washing one eye drop out with another. This is true for prescription medication as well as for over-the-counter eye drop medication.

**For more information, scan the code with your smartphone or visit the website listed.**



<http://www.kellogg.umich.edu/patientcare/conditions/glaucoma.html>

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