

Screening for Glaucoma

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) has issued a **final** recommendation statement on *Screening for Glaucoma*.

This final recommendation statement applies to adults who do not have signs or symptoms of glaucoma or other vision problems. It applies only to screening provided by a primary care professional. Primary care professionals include doctors and nurses who provide general health care. This recommendation does not discuss care provided by vision specialists, such as ophthalmologists and optometrists, who conduct comprehensive eye exams.

The Task Force reviewed recent research studies on screening for glaucoma. The final recommendation statement summarizes what the Task Force learned about this screening: There is not enough evidence to determine the potential benefits and harms of glaucoma screening for adults who do not have signs or symptoms of glaucoma or other vision problems.

This fact sheet explains the recommendation and what it might mean for you.

What is glaucoma?

Glaucoma is a group of diseases that can harm the eye's optic nerve. The optic nerve carries visual information from the eye to the brain. A healthy optic nerve is essential to good vision. Glaucoma can lead to vision problems and blindness.

Facts About Glaucoma

Glaucoma is a serious disease that affects many Americans. Older adults and African Americans have the greatest risk for developing glaucoma. Hispanics also may be at increased risk.

We don't fully understand why glaucoma develops. In most cases, glaucoma progresses slowly and doesn't cause pain or vision problems. Glaucoma often occurs when the normal pressure of the fluid inside the eye slowly rises. However, it can also occur in people who do not have a rise in eye pressure. Glaucoma can lead to blindness, but we don't know which people with early signs of disease will develop serious vision problems or blindness.

There are two major types of glaucoma—"open-angle" and "closed-angle."

- Open-angle glaucoma is a chronic condition that progresses slowly over a long period of time. It is the most common type of glaucoma. It affects about 2.5 million Americans and is a leading cause of blindness.
- Closed-angle glaucoma develops quickly and usually causes painful and immediate vision problems. People who experience this should go to their health care professional right away. It is much less common than open-angle glaucoma.

Vision problems in people with open-angle glaucoma usually start with a blind spot in a person's overall vision. These are called a "visual field defect." People generally don't notice these defects until the disease has progressed to an advanced stage.

Screening for Glaucoma

Glaucoma screening is often done with tests that look at changes in the optic nerve, changes in the pressure of the fluid in the eye, and changes in visual fields. The goal of screening is to identify early glaucoma (often visual field defects) that does not affect a person's vision but might suggest that he or she is at risk for losing vision in the future. This helps identify people who might benefit from treatment.

The Task Force focused its review on screening for open-angle glaucoma.

Potential Benefits and Harms of Screening

The Task Force did not find any studies that directly addressed the benefits or harms of glaucoma screening. The Task Force also could not determine from the available evidence whether screening adults without vision problems improves their long-term health and prevents blindness. One challenge is that there is no widely accepted way of diagnosing glaucoma that can be used to determine whether glaucoma screening tests are accurate or not.

In the absence of clear and consistent evidence, the Task Force suggests that patients at increased risk, especially African Americans and older adults, talk to their primary care clinician or eye care specialist for advice about glaucoma screening.

Glaucoma is a serious disease that affects the health and quality of life of millions of Americans. The Task Force encourages more research on glaucoma. Investments in this research can lead to improved health and vision for Americans.

The Final Recommendation Statement on Screening for Glaucoma: What Does It Mean?

Here is the Task Force's final recommendation statement on screening for glaucoma. The final recommendation statement has letter grades. The grades are based on the quality and strength of the evidence about the potential benefits and harms of the screening and counseling. It also is based on the size of the potential benefits and harms. Task Force recommendation grades are explained in the box at the end of this fact sheet.

When there is not enough evidence to judge potential benefits and harms, the Task Force does not make a recommendation for or against—it issues an I Statement. The Notes next to the recommendation explain key ideas.

Visit the Task Force Web site to read the full [final recommendation statement](#). The statement explains the evidence the Task Force reviewed and how it decided on the grade. An [evidence report](#) provides more detail about the studies the Task Force reviewed.

- 1 The Task Force concludes that the current *evidence is insufficient* to assess the balance of benefits and harms of screening for *primary* open-angle glaucoma in *adults*.
I Statement

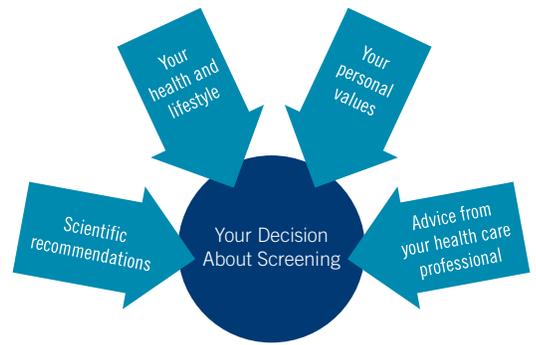
Notes

- 1 *evidence is insufficient*
The Task Force did not find enough evidence on the potential benefits and harms of screening for glaucoma.
primary
Not caused by another condition.
adults
People ages 18 and older.

Should You Be Screened for Glaucoma?

Getting the best health care means making smart decisions about what screening tests, counseling services, and preventive medicines to get and when to get them. Many people don't get the tests or counseling they need. Others get tests or counseling they don't need or that may be harmful to them.

Task Force recommendations can help you learn about screening tests, counseling services, and preventive medicines. These services can keep you healthy and prevent disease. The Task Force recommendations do not cover diagnosis (tests to find out why you are sick) or treatment of disease. Task Force recommendations also apply to some healthcare settings but not others. For example, this recommendation does not apply to glaucoma screening or care provided by vision care specialists, who conduct comprehensive eye exams.



Deciding Whether to Get Screened for Glaucoma

Consider your own health and lifestyle. Think about your personal beliefs and preferences for health care. Talk with your doctor or nurse if you are concerned about your risk for glaucoma or think your vision may be getting worse. And consider scientific recommendations, like this one from the Task Force. If you do get a screening test, talk with your doctor or nurse about the results of the test and next steps you may need to take.

What is the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force?

The Task Force is an independent group of national experts in prevention and evidence-based medicine. The Task Force works to improve the health of all Americans by making evidence-based recommendations about clinical preventive services such as screenings, counseling services, or preventive medicines. The recommendations apply to people with no signs or symptoms of the disease being discussed. Recommendations only address services offered in the primary care setting or services referred by a primary care clinician.

To develop a recommendation statement, Task Force members consider the best available science and research on a topic. For each topic, the Task Force posts draft documents for public comment, including a draft recommendation statement. All comments are reviewed and considered in developing the **final recommendation statement**. To learn more, visit the [Task Force Web site](#).

USPSTF Recommendation Grades	
Grade	Definition
A	Recommended.
B	Recommended.
C	Recommendation depends on the patient's situation.
D	Not recommended.
I statement	There is not enough evidence to make a recommendation.

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(National Eye Institute, National Institute of Health)
-  **Information About Healthy Vision: Glaucoma**
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