

Driving with Glaucoma

A guide for physicians

Patients with glaucoma often wonder about their ability to drive safely, and we as their doctors may struggle with how to counsel our patients.

How does glaucoma affect driving?

Glaucoma may impair driving skills with narrowing peripheral vision, enlarged blind spots, loss of contrast, blurred vision, and decreased night vision. These impairments can make driving challenging. Driving at night can become especially difficult. Since symptoms from glaucoma often do not become apparent or recognizable until the condition is quite advanced, changes to one's ability to drive may be one of the first signs of glaucoma. In some cases, it is a patient's family members who first notice difficulties with driving. Other age-related eye diseases may also adversely affect driving. On the other hand, driving cessation may have a detrimental impact on the elderly in terms of depression and lifestyle changes.

Dangers associated with driving with glaucoma

Multiple studies have considered the dangers associated with glaucoma and driving. People with visual field loss from glaucoma may have slower reaction time to respond to changes in road conditions. Another recent study¹ found that older drivers with glaucoma had a 65% higher accident rate over 5 years compared with their peers without glaucoma.

¹Kwon et al. Ophthalmology 2015,
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ophtha.2015.08.043>

Good News

Many patients with glaucoma may continue to drive safely

Since driving is a complex task, of which vision is one component, conventional clinical tests (visual fields) may suggest those that have a driving impairment outside of state requirements, but are not definitive and that some may need on road driving evaluation to determine their driving risk. There are some legal guidelines limits in place that outline exactly when patients should no longer get behind the wheel.

- State Departments of Motor Vehicles typically require visual acuity of at least 20/40 and a horizontal field of vision with both eyes open of at least 120 degrees. https://eyewiki.aao.org/Driving_Restrictions_per_State
- A special visual field test performed with both eyes open may also be required to assess the driving field of vision.
- Visual acuity requirements may vary by state.

Ways to better ensure the safe driving vision

- Encourage patients to get regular eye exams; keep eyeglass and contact lens prescriptions up to date.
- Polarized sunglasses and anti-reflective coating may also help by blocking glare and light halos.
- For those who need additional assistance, driver training programs are available at state eye rehabilitation centers. They can teach the driver techniques and help with installation of mirrors to optimize the vehicles for driving.

The goal is to make driving safer by optimizing vision and educating patients about its potentially serious risks. The bottom line: safety comes first.

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655 Beach Street, San Francisco, CA 94109 415.561.8587 ags@aao.org

