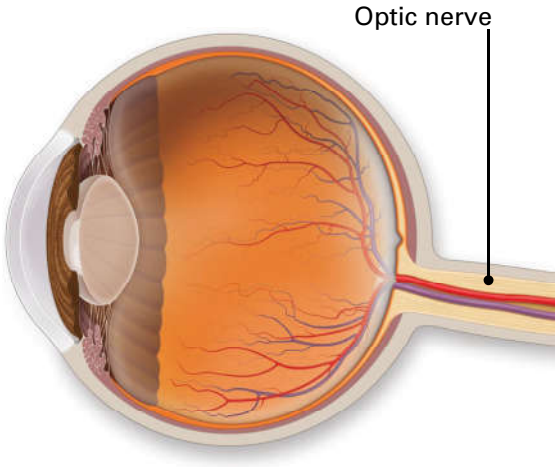
Optic Neuritis

What is optic neuritis?

Optic neuritis is swelling of the eye's optic nerve. The optic nerve carries light signals from the back of your eye to your brain so you can see. If the optic nerve is swollen, damaged or infected, you cannot see clearly.

Doctors do not know for sure what causes optic neuritis. This condition may be caused by the body's immune system attacking optic nerve tissue by mistake. It seems more likely to happen in people who have had viral problems like mumps, measles, flu or multiple sclerosis, among others.



A swollen, damaged, or infected optic nerve causes eye and vision problems.

What are optic neuritis symptoms?

You can have optic neuritis in one or both eyes. Symptoms may appear all of a sudden or develop gradually over a few days. They can include:

- Blurry vision
- Dim vision, as if someone turned down the lights
- Colors appearing dull and faded
- Pain in the back of your eye socket
- Pain when you move your eyes

Optic neuritis symptoms can be worse when you are hot or very tired. For instance, you might notice more symptoms when you exercise or take a bath.

If optic neuritis is not treated, its symptoms can get worse. If you have optic neuritis symptoms, talk with your ophthalmologist.

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How is optic neuritis diagnosed?

Your ophthalmologist will check your eyes thoroughly and do the following things:

- Check to see if your optic nerve is swollen by looking inside your eye with an instrument called an ophthalmoscope.
- Test your side (peripheral) vision.
- Test to check how well you see colors.
- Check to see how your pupils respond to light.

Your ophthalmologist may also want certain tests to show detailed images of your visual system. They could include a CT scan, MRI scan or visual

brain wave recording (which shows how your brain processes visual information).

How is optic neuritis treated?

Some people get better without any treatment for optic neuritis. However, many people need treatment to improve vision or, at least, keep their symptoms from getting worse.

The most common treatment is a medicine called corticosteroids. For most people, taking corticosteroids helps improve their vision a lot. Sometimes, it can even help vision return to what it was before optic neuritis. However, for people with multiple sclerosis or other conditions, treatment usually does not bring their vision back to what it was before optic neuritis.

It is very important to see an ophthalmologist if you have optic neuritis symptoms. Treatment can keep symptoms from getting worse and could save your vision.

Summary

Optic neuritis is swelling of your optic nerve, the nerve that connects your eye to your brain. Symptoms include blurry or dim vision, colors appearing faded, pain in your eye socket and pain when you move your eyes. People who have had mumps, measles, flu or multiple sclerosis are more likely to get optic neuritis.

To diagnose optic neuritis, your ophthalmologist will check your optic nerve for signs of swelling. He or she may have you do tests that provide detailed images of your visual system.

Optic neuritis is usually treated with corticosteroid medicine, and vision often improves quite a bit. However, people who have MS or other conditions may not see as much improvement.

If you have any questions about your eyes or your vision, speak with your ophthalmologist. He or she is committed to protecting your sight.

Get more information about optic neuritis from EyeSmart—provided by the American Academy of Ophthalmology—at **aao.org/optic-neuritis-link**.

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