

GLAUCOMA MEDICINES ONLY WORK IF YOU TAKE THEM

If you have glaucoma, you are probably using eye drop medications to lower your eye pressure. In glaucoma, high eye pressure damages the optic nerve—which connects your eye to your brain and tells your brain what you are looking at—taking your sight away with it. Nerve damage from glaucoma is permanent. Lost sight is gone forever. The goal of glaucoma treatment is to lower the eye pressure to prevent any more damage and save your sight.

There are many reasons that people don't take their medications as regularly as they should, and they don't always tell their doctor about these reasons. It is very important that you use your glaucoma medications faithfully, and if there is a reason why you can't take them regularly, you should share this with your doctor. There are many solutions available to help you overcome whatever problems keep you from taking good care of yourself. Some of these problems and possible solutions include the following:

Forgetting to use them. If you frequently forget to use your eye drops (more than once a week), try using routine daily activities as reminders. A morning drop can be remembered if you start putting it in whenever you brush your teeth in the morning. An evening drop can be remembered if you put it in right before you turn off the light before bed. Ask a family member to help you remember—they love you and want to help you save your sight.

Bothersome side effects. Some drops have mild side effects (brief stinging, darker eye lashes), but others have life-altering side effects (such as asthma or erectile dysfunction). If you frequently choose not to use your drops due to unwanted side effects, tell your doctor immediately. You can then work together to find a medication that is easier for you to tolerate.

Cost issues. All medications are expensive, and glaucoma drugs are no exception. Most commonly-used drops are new medications and there are no generic versions available yet. If you cannot afford your medication, all drug companies have special programs that will provide you with medications at reduced or little cost. Your doctor can help you enroll in these programs.

Difficulty getting the drops in. Holding the eye drop bottle over your eye and squeezing a single drop into your eye can be challenging. To make matters worse, some bottles are made of hard plastic and are very hard to squeeze, especially if you have arthritis, weakness, or tremors. Dosing aids that help hold the bottle, aim the bottle, and squeeze the bottle, are available for some medications, and your doctor can help you get these helpers. In addition, asking a family member to help put your drops in can make dosing much easier.

The drops don't seem to help. Treating glaucoma is largely preventive—the medications lower the eye pressure to prevent damage. And since high eye pressure does not cause pain or blurred vision or other symptoms, using your drops regularly does not provide any detectable relief. It's natural to think that since they are not making you feel better—or see better—that they are not working and are not worth the hassle. But if your medication lowers your eye pressure, then it is working, and you should keep taking it to keep your eye pressure low and prevent further nerve damage.