

Optic Neuritis

Optic neuritis is an inflammation of the eye's optic nerve.

In order for you to see, the optic nerve carries nerve impulses from the eye to the brain, where they are interpreted as images. Damage or infection of the optic nerve can affect vision significantly.

What are the symptoms of optic neuritis?

Optic neuritis may occur in one or both eyes. Symptoms may appear suddenly or slowly (over a few days) and may include:

- Blurred vision
- Dim vision (as if someone turned down the lights);
- Abnormal color vision (colors appear dull and faded);
- Pain in the back of the eye socket;
- Pain when moving the eyes.

The symptoms may get worse with heat or exhaustion, particularly when exercising or taking a bath. If optic neuritis goes undiagnosed and untreated, the symptoms may continue to get worse.

If you experience any of these symptoms, contact your ophthalmologist for an eye examination. To investigate your symptoms, your ophthalmologist may:

- Check for swelling of your optic nerve by examining the eye with an instrument called an ophthalmoscope;
- Perform visual tests for color and side vision;
- Check the reaction of your pupil to light;
- Perform other tests such as ultrasound, computerized tomography (CT) scans, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans, or visual brain wave recordings.

What causes optic neuritis?

Optic neuritis is associated with various diseases and conditions, such as:

- Mumps;
- Measles;
- Influenza;
- Multiple sclerosis;
- Leber's optic neuropathy (a rare eye condition that runs in families);
- Vascular occlusions of the optic nerve.

In many cases, however, optic neuritis occurs with no known cause.

How is optic neuritis treated?

For some patients, a medication called corticosteroids may be used to treat optic neuritis. In most cases, vision will either improve significantly or return to normal. Some patients, however, may not recover their normal vision, particularly if they have a pre-existing condition such as multiple sclerosis.

Although some people recover normal vision without any treatment, it is imperative that you consult your ophthalmologist to determine the cause of optic neuritis so that you can receive appropriate treatment and avoid permanent damage to your eyes.