

Columbus Ophthalmology Associates
OPTIC NEURITIS

What is optic neuritis?

The optic nerve carries the images we see from the eye to our brain. All visual information is carried down the optic nerve, much like a cable of electric wires. If these wires or nerve endings become inflamed, they will not carry the vital information properly. Inflammation of the optic nerve is called optic neuritis. It may result in poor vision.

What causes optic neuritis?

There are many causes of optic neuritis. In children and young adults, inflammation of the optic nerve can occur following a viral illness or an upper respiratory infection. Certain neurological diseases such as multiple sclerosis can also be related to patients with optic neuritis.

What are the symptoms?

Patients with this disorder describe a sudden decrease in their vision, similar to someone turning down the light switch. Color vision can be affected and there can be pain in the socket of the eye, especially when moving the eyes from side to side. The vision can decrease significantly over a week or two until patients are barely able to perceive light.

How is optic neuritis detected and diagnosed?

During an examination, the optic nerve may show some signs of swelling detected by your doctor. To better evaluate your problem, other tests may be necessary such as peripheral vision evaluation, color vision analysis as well as observing the reaction of your pupil to light.

If indicated, your family physician or a neurologist may need to become involved. An MRI or CT scan may be necessary to detect swelling that is located behind the eye. Blood tests or other neurological exams may also be necessary as determined by your physician.

What treatment is available?

The treatment for optic neuritis is usually simple observation. Most patients have a recovery of their visual acuity over about a 4 to 6 week period. If something is detected on your neurological evaluation however, more definitive therapy may be necessary.

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