

## What is Optic Neuritis?

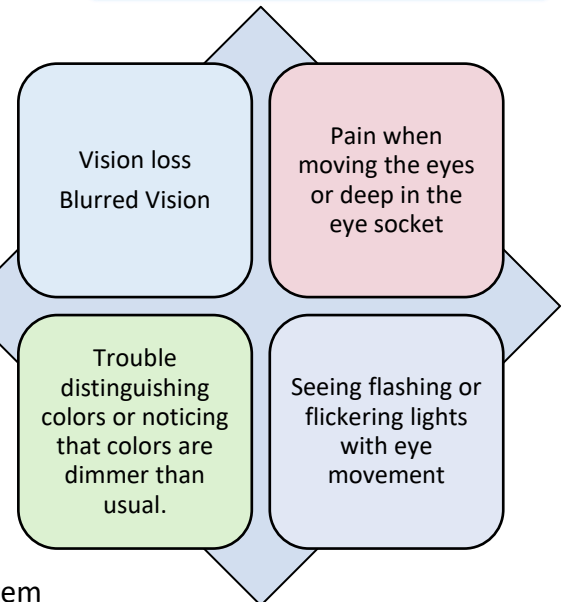
The optic nerve connects the eye to the brain. Optic neuritis means that the optic nerve is inflamed or swollen. It is one of the most common causes of vision loss in younger people. Optic neuritis usually affects one eye at a time.

### More common in ...

- Adults age 20 - 40
- Women
- Caucasian race
- History of multiple sclerosis

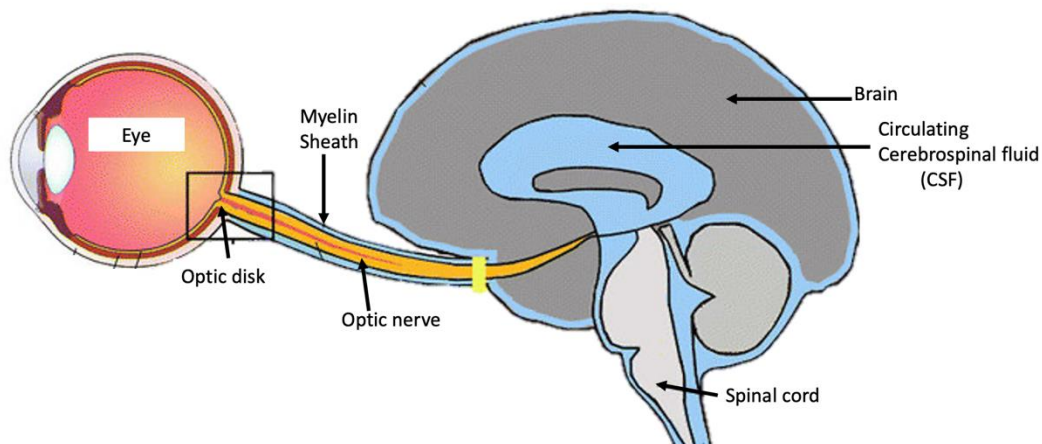
## What are the symptoms of optic neuritis?

Optic neuritis causes loss of vision, particularly colour vision, and may cause pain when moving the eye. When pain occurs, it often starts before the change in vision. Vision loss can progress over a few days. The severity of symptoms varies widely, from seeing a small smudge to complete vision loss. Having severe symptoms doesn't necessarily mean that optic neuritis will not improve.



## What causes optic neuritis?

The exact cause is not known. It is thought that the immune system mistakenly targets the substance covering your optic nerve, called myelin, causing it to become inflamed and damaged. This can happen after a viral infection, due to an autoimmune disease (such as multiple sclerosis) or for no known reason (called idiopathic).



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## How is optic neuritis diagnosed?

Optic neuritis may be difficult to diagnose, as your eye can look perfectly normal. Your doctor may examine the back of your eye where the tip of the optic nerve is visible. The optic nerve can look red or swollen, but often looks normal if the swelling is further back. Your doctor may check your pupils, colour vision and peripheral vision, as well as your vision on the eye chart, to make the diagnosis. An MRI isn't needed to diagnose optic neuritis, but is helpful to predict your risk of developing multiple sclerosis.

### Do I have multiple sclerosis?

- Optic neuritis is a common symptom of multiple sclerosis (MS), an autoimmune neurologic disorder. The body's immune system episodically attacks multiple areas of the brain and spinal cord, including the optic nerve. Each attack causes a problem with the affected body part (e.g. leg weakness, arm numbness, bladder problems, etc).
- Having optic neuritis does not mean you have MS. In fact, only half of people with optic neuritis will get MS. If you have a normal MRI, that risk drops to 25%.
- Optic neuritis associated with MS is more likely to recur.

## How is optic neuritis treated?

Optic neuritis improves on its own without any treatment. The pain will usually go away in a few days. The vision problems improve or resolve in the majority (92%) of patients over a few months. There are rare patients who have continued or progressive vision loss. But even patients who get back 20/20 vision are still aware that the eye is not completely normal. The vision may seem blurred, dim, or distorted with colours appearing "washed out" when compared to the other eye. Recovery is usually complete around 6 months, although both earlier and later improvement is possible. You may notice that your symptoms come back temporarily with exercise, heat, or stress.

Treatment with high dose steroids can help the vision recover faster, but does not change the final outcome. Steroids can be taken by mouth or by IV and work just as well either way. Your doctor will usually follow you for a few years to monitor for symptoms of MS.