

Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals **NHS**

NHS Trust

Oxford Eye Hospital

Glaucoma

Information for patients



What is Glaucoma?

The eye produces a nourishing fluid called the aqueous humour. This fluid circulates around the tissues of the eye and drains away through outflow channel. 'Normal' eye pressure is when the amount of fluid produced is balanced by the amount of fluid draining away. If the drainage tubes within the eye become slightly blocked, preventing eye fluid from draining properly, then the pressure inside the eye builds up.

Glaucoma is a disease of the optic nerve which is often associated with a raise in the eye pressure. If glaucoma is left untreated it can result in the loss of peripheral vision.

Glaucoma can affect the sight in two ways:

- Chronic – very common with a gradual onset often without signs or symptoms
- Acute – very rare which occurs suddenly with a sharp rise in eye pressure causing pain, sickness & loss of sight

Signs and symptoms

As the most common form of glaucoma is chronic, it is not unusual for the disease to be present without you knowing. This is because the disease affects the outer field of vision (peripheral vision) first, which often goes unnoticed.

What are the causes?

- Age – glaucoma becomes more likely as you get older
- Short sight – it is slightly more common in people who are short-sighted
- Diabetes
- Afro-Caribbean patients are more susceptible to glaucoma
- Family History means that if your parents or siblings develop glaucoma there is a significant risk that you will too. In this instance, yearly eye checks with an Optician for eye pressure is essential for early detection of the disease. These checks are free of charge at your Optician.

Importance of early diagnosis

If you have glaucoma, it can take a long time before you realize that you have a problem with your eyesight. This is because glaucoma tends to damage the outer edge of the eye and work slowly inwards. You may not notice a problem until the disease starts to affect the central part of the eye. **Treatment can prevent the damage from becoming worse but it cannot reverse damage that has already happened.**

Tests for glaucoma:

Eye pressure test

A local anaesthetic drop is placed in both eyes. The drops will be effective for 2-3 minutes only. A small instrument is placed gently against the eye to measure the intraocular pressure.

General examination

The examiner can look into the eyes to see if the optic nerve is damaged.

Visual field test

This test checks for missing areas of peripheral vision. In this test various light spots are displayed on a screen before you. You are asked to indicate which ones you can see.

All tests are very simple and painless.

Treatment

The aim of treatment is to reduce the pressure in the affected eye, either by helping the fluid to drain away or by reducing the amount of fluid produced.

The usual treatment for chronic glaucoma is eye drops. At an early stage damage to the optic nerve can be prevented by controlling the eye pressure and this is achieved through the regular use of eye drops. These drops are needed for life and will be reviewed when you have glaucoma checks. It is **essential** that these drops are not stopped without instructions from the Eye Surgeon. Repeat prescriptions

of the eye drops can be obtained via the GP who is kept informed of your progress and treatment.

Glaucoma checks take place at the Eye Hospital or local Optician depending of the severity and progress of the disease. The frequency of these checks can vary from between 3 to 12 monthly.

Alternative treatment

There is no known way to prevent this condition.

Risks

Vision can deteriorate if treatment is ineffective or the medication is not used on a regular basis. In some instances laser treatment or surgery is required to create an alternative draining channel within the eye.

Questions or concerns

If you have any questions or concerns about your eyes, please telephone and ask to speak to one of the nurses:

Tel: Oxford (01865) 231117

Further information

www.nhsconditions.nhs.uk

If you need an interpreter or need a document in another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221473** or email **PALSJR@orh.nhs.uk**

Rebecca Turner, Matron for Specialist Surgery
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Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals NHS Trust
Oxford OX3 9DU
www.oxfordradcliffe.nhs.uk