

Glaucoma and your relatives

What is glaucoma?

Glaucoma is a condition in which the intraocular pressure (IOP) causes damage to your vision. It may be because the IOP is raised, or because your optic nerve, which is responsible for your vision, is particularly fragile and susceptible to 'normal' levels of IOP. We don't yet know why some people's optic nerves are more susceptible to damage from the IOP than other people's nerves are. As it is the IOP which damages your sight in glaucoma, the treatment aims to reduce the IOP to a level at which further damage is reduced or stopped.

What is ocular hypertension?

Ocular hypertension is a condition in which the IOP is raised above what would be considered to be normal, but the raised pressure has not caused detectable damage to the optic nerve. Just like some people's optic nerves appear to be particularly susceptible to 'normal' IOP levels, other people's optic nerves appear to be particularly tough and resistant to 'high' IOP levels. Ocular hypertension is a risk factor for developing glaucoma. Other risk factors are ethnicity (glaucoma is much more common in African-Caribbean and Asian people), age, having a close relative with glaucoma, being short-sighted or being diabetic.

How is glaucoma detected?

Glaucoma is usually painless and does not cause symptoms until it is quite far advanced, so it is important that you have regular eye examinations to detect it. There are three tests for detecting glaucoma. These are:

1. **Ophthalmoscopy:**

Viewing the appearance of the optic nerve at the back of your eye using an ophthalmoscope or slit lamp.

2. **Tonometry:**

Measuring the IOP within your eye. This may be done using a puff of air, although there are other ways to do it too.

3. **Perimetry:**

Testing your field of vision to make sure you can see all the way around when you are looking straight at something. Whenever an optometrist performs a sight test they must examine the back of your eye (ophthalmoscopy). If you are at risk from glaucoma the College of Optometrists recommends that you have tonometry as well. Your optometrist will decide whether you need to have perimetry done.

Does glaucoma run in families?

Although most relatives of people diagnosed with glaucoma will not have the condition, if you have a close blood relative (brother, sister, parent, child) with glaucoma you are at an increased risk of developing the condition.

The risk is higher if the person who has glaucoma is your sibling rather than if they are your parent or child. Other more distant relatives are also at some increased risk of developing glaucoma.

We recommend that if someone has been diagnosed with glaucoma or ocular hypertension that their close relatives have regular eye health checks (at least every two years).

Will I have to pay to have my eyes checked?

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, if you are aged 60 and over, or aged 40 and over and have a close relative (sibling, parent or child) who has glaucoma the NHS will pay for your sight test. This will include an examination of the back of your eye, and would normally include measuring your IOP. It will also include perimetry if your optometrist feels it is necessary.

Some optometrists may also offer you a scan of your optic nerve for an additional charge. You will always have the option to decline any additional tests, so that you don't have to pay for your visit. If you have a close relative with ocular hypertension you may have to pay for a sight test but we still strongly recommend having regular eye health checks.

In Scotland, the NHS pays for eye examinations for everyone.

Glaucoma can be treated. The earlier it is detected, the more successful the treatment is likely to be in controlling it and preventing visual loss. Most people with early glaucoma have no symptoms. It is therefore important to ensure that relatives of those diagnosed with glaucoma have regular eye examinations.

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Disclaimer

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The International Glaucoma Association cannot take responsibility if patients rely solely on the information in this leaflet.



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For more information

Please call: **01233 64 81 70** or email: info@iga.org.uk to receive free copies of:

- Glaucoma - A Guide
- Dry Eye Syndrome - A Guide
- Ocular Hypertension - A Guide
- Eye Drops and Dispensing Aids

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A full list of references is available on request.

Formed in 1974, the IGA has the mission to raise awareness of glaucoma, promote research related to early diagnosis and treatment and to provide support to patients and all those who care for them. Funded entirely by its members and donors (no government or statutory funding) the Association provides its services free of charge to anyone in need of assistance.

If you found this leaflet helpful and would like to support our work, please contact us on 01233 64 81 64 or visit www.glaucoma-association.com to make a donation or become a member (benefits: quarterly magazine, invitations to patient meetings, support research).

This leaflet has been provided to you free of charge thanks to the voluntary donations of our members and friends.

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