

GLAUCOMA

What is glaucoma?

Glaucoma is the name for a group of eye conditions in which the optic nerve is damaged at the point where it leaves the eye. This causes a loss of peripheral vision which is why it can go undetected until the later stages. If it remains undetected for a long period of time then it may result in "tunnel vision" and blindness. The optic nerve carries information from the light sensitive layer in your eye, the retina, to the brain where it is perceived as a picture.

Your eye needs a certain amount of pressure to keep the eyeball in shape so that it can work properly. In some people, the damage is caused by raised pressure. Others may have an eye pressure within normal limits but damage occurs because there is a weakness in the optic nerve. In most cases both factors are involved but to a varying extent.

Raised ocular pressure is NOT the same as high blood pressure and detection of the early stages of glaucoma is often difficult because it is so gradual.

Are there different types of glaucoma?

Yes there are four main types:

Chronic Glaucoma: This is the most common type of glaucoma. The eye pressure rises very slowly and there is no pain to show there is a problem, but the field of vision gradually become impaired.

Acute Glaucoma: This is less common in western countries. This type of glaucoma occurs when there is a sudden blockage to the flow of aqueous fluid to the eye. This can be quite painful and will cause permanent damage to your sight if not treated properly.

Secondary Glaucoma: This type of glaucoma occurs as a result of a rise in eye pressure caused by another eye condition.

Developmental Glaucoma: This is a rare but sometimes serious condition which occurs in babies and is caused by a malformation in the eye.

How common is glaucoma?

In the UK some form of glaucoma affects about 2 in 100 people over the age of 40.

Are some people particularly at risk of chronic glaucoma?

Yes. There are several factors which increase the risk:

Age: Chronic glaucoma becomes much more common with increasing age. It is uncommon below the age of 40 but affects one percent of people over this age and five percent over 65.

Race: If you are of African origin you are more at risk of chronic glaucoma.

Family: If you have a close relative who has chronic glaucoma then you should have regular eye examinations. You should advise other members of your family to do the same. This is especially true if you are over 40. Those with a family history of glaucoma are 10 times more likely to develop it.

Short sight: People with a high degree of short sight are more prone to chronic glaucoma.

Diabetes: It is believed that diabetics have an increased risk of developing chronic glaucoma.

Can glaucoma be treated?

If detected early enough, glaucoma can usually be treated. In most cases, eyedrops to reduce the pressure will be prescribed, although in some cases a minor operation is needed. Treatment is unable to restore vision that has been lost but aims to preserve the remaining sight.

Regular eye examinations where the ocular health, eye pressure and field of vision are checked are essential. If you are worried about glaucoma, or would like any more information then just contact the practise and we will be happy to talk to you.