

A Guide to Glaucoma

Introduction

As you have received this leaflet, your optometrist (optician) has examined your eyes, carried out an assessment and decided that there is a strong possibility that you may have, or may be at risk of having, glaucoma. Your optometrist has decided to refer you to a hospital where you will be examined by an ophthalmologist (eye doctor) who will be able to determine whether you have glaucoma and whether treatment is required. This is a direct referral and there is no need for you to make an appointment with your GP but **please take a list of your current medications to the hospital eye clinic appointment.** A copy of the referral form will be sent to your GP so that they are aware of what is happening.

What is glaucoma?

Glaucoma is a condition in which the optic nerve is damaged by high pressure inside the eye. Although your eye needs a certain amount of pressure to keep it in shape so that it can work properly, if the pressure is too high, damage may occur. Damage to the optic nerve initially results in a permanent loss of part of the peripheral vision. In the early stages this is not noticeable by the patient and so they are unaware that they have glaucoma. A detailed eye examination may detect the damage at this early stage. If the glaucoma remains untreated, the visual loss spreads to the centre of vision. This is when it becomes noticeable to the patient and the damage cannot be reversed by lowering the pressure. Early diagnosis and treatment are required to prevent serious visual loss.

Glaucoma normally affects people over the age of 40. It can run in families and so it is recommended that family members over the age of 40 have their eyes examined annually by their optometrist. For parents, brothers, sisters and children of someone with glaucoma, who are over 40 years of age, this examination will be free on the NHS.

What will happen next?

Your optometrist will forward your details to the Referral Support Centre at NHS Swindon Clinical Commissioning Group. They will contact you by letter asking you to ring them so that they can help you choose a hospital and book your appointment. The Referral Support Centre will then pass on your details to the hospital you have chosen, who will send you a letter confirming your appointment.

What will happen at the hospital?

Please do not drive to your appointment as you may have your eyes dilated which can blur your vision. At the hospital you will be seen by an ophthalmologist. The eye pressure will be measured, the visual field tested and the optic nerve examined for signs of damage. If a diagnosis of glaucoma is made the ophthalmologist will explain the treatment and follow up required. After the appointment, the eye doctor will write to your optometrist, your GP and send you a copy of the letter.

What treatment will I need?

If glaucoma is confirmed then it is likely that you will be given eye drops which will help to reduce the pressure of the eye. If this does not work surgery may be required. It is important to attend hospital for regular checks; your eye doctor will indicate when these need to be.

If glaucoma is suspected you will be reviewed in a hospital clinic on a regular basis.

If glaucoma is excluded you will be referred back to your community optometrist who will keep you under regular review. In this case, it is important to follow the advice of your optometrist as to how often you are reviewed and never to go over two years between appointments.

What will happen to my vision?

Early detection and treatment of glaucoma is the key to protecting your eyes from serious loss of vision, which can happen if no action is taken. Your eye doctor will talk to you about the effects of glaucoma on your vision and any implications it may have for you.