

Ocular Hypertension and Your Relatives

What is ocular hypertension?

Ocular hypertension is a condition in which the intraocular pressure (the pressure inside the eye) is raised above the normal level but the raised pressure has not caused detectable damage to the vision.

What is glaucoma?

Glaucoma is a condition in which the intraocular pressure is raised and may have caused damage to the vision. It is thought that some eyes with raised pressure don't suffer damage because the optic nerve (the nerve of sight) and its supporting structure (the lamina cribrosa) are stronger in some eyes than others. In some people pressures within the normal range can cause glaucoma and this is known as normal tension glaucoma.

Therefore, the higher the pressure within the eye, the greater the risk of developing glaucoma. This is the reason that ocular hypertension is sometimes treated.

Link between ocular hypertension and glaucoma

Ocular hypertension is a risk factor for glaucoma, the other risk factors being family history, age (over 40), certain races such as people of African descent, myopia above a certain level (near sightedness) and a previous eye injury.

This leaflet describes the risks of glaucoma and the tests required to detect this condition and recommends regular testing for glaucoma, which will also detect ocular hypertension. If two or more family members have been diagnosed with ocular hypertension or primary open angle glaucoma (POAG) then testing the other members of the family is particularly advisable. In general, first degree relatives (brother, sister, parent, child) of people with POAG are more likely to have glaucoma than others without a close family history.

Even if you seem to have excellent sight, this doesn't rule out glaucoma because:

- POAG (the commonest type of glaucoma) initially destroys the off-centre vision, leaving the central detailed vision unaffected until a late stage

- POAG generally starts in one eye first and blank patches in the field of vision may go unnoticed as the less affected eye 'completes the picture' for the worse eye
- POAG does not affect the ability of the eye to focus and may be present even though the vision is fine without the need for glasses

You could lose a considerable amount of sight irretrievably before you are aware of a problem.

Glaucoma/ocular hypertension is usually painless and does not cause symptoms until it is quite advanced. It is therefore important to have regular eye health checks which test for it at an early stage. There are three tests that are used to check for glaucoma and ocular hypertension.

These tests are rapid and painless.
They are:

Ophthalmoscopy:

Viewing your optic nerve using an ophthalmoscope (special torch).

Tonometry:

Measuring the pressure within your eye.

Perimetry:

Testing your field of vision. This may not be required if your optic nerve appears healthy and if your eye pressure is within the normal range.

When you have an eye health check the optometrist must, by law, examine the back of your eye. This will include looking at your optic nerve. It is also recommended that everyone who is considered to be at risk of glaucoma (such as those people who are over the age of forty) has the pressure measured within their eyes. This is often done by gently blowing a puff of air at your eye. If the results of either of these tests are inconclusive, your optometrist may also ask you to do a field of vision test to make sure everything is normal.

If you have a brother, sister, parent or child with glaucoma and you are aged over 40, you are entitled to a free eye test under the NHS. Ask for the relevant form (GOS 1) when you book an appointment. You will still need to ensure that all three tests are carried out. Please note that eye tests are free for all in Scotland.

Treatment for POAG is usually with eye drops. Laser treatment or surgery may be necessary in some cases. The good news is that once it is detected and treated, most people retain good usable vision for their lifetime.

Glaucoma left untreated may lead to tunnel vision and, eventually, to blindness. It is estimated that approximately two per cent of people over the age of 40 have glaucoma, 13 per cent of those on the blind register have glaucoma of some type.

**Don't be a statistic – give yourself peace
of mind. Arrange an eye test today!**



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For more information

For a free information pack, or to discuss your glaucoma, please call Sightline on **01233 64 81 70**

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A full list of references and information sources used in the compilation of this leaflet is available on request by phone: 01233 64 81 70 (Sightline) or by email: info@iga.org.uk

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).

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