

Ophthalmology: Glaucoma

Guidance for patients

March 2022



Glaucoma

Introduction

The Ophthalmology department treats patients for various eyes conditions. NWAFT offer appointments at all 3 hospital sites. An ophthalmologist treats people of all ages, from premature babies to the elderly. Conditions dealt with in ophthalmology can include eye trauma, cataracts, diabetic eye conditions such as diabetic retinopathy, as well as congenital and genetic eye problems. Ophthalmologists diagnose, treat and prevent disorders of the eyes and visual system, using medical and surgical skills.

Glaucoma is a disease affecting the optic nerve, which carries images from the retina to the brain. In most cases of glaucoma the normal fluid pressure within the eye (known as intraocular pressure (IOP)) slowly raises, putting pressure on these nerve fibres. Untreated this may lead to loss of vision as the fibres die, ultimately leading to blindness. The disease usually affects both eyes although the pressure often builds up in one eye first.

Guidance for Patients

The fluid within the eye (known as aqueous humour) helps to bathe and nourish the lens, iris, and cornea. It is produced by the tissues around the lens and drains out of the eye and into the bloodstream. This happens through a tiny network of drainage canals near the iris called the trabecular meshwork. With the most common form of glaucoma (open-angle glaucoma) the fluid drains out of the eye too slowly. There is another form (closed-angle glaucoma) in which these drainage canals become blocked altogether, although this is far less common.

Frequently asked questions:

Is glaucoma common?

Very. It affects approximately half a million people in the UK alone and many have lost their sight as a result. Given the nature of the disease it is believed that many people are affected without even realising it. It is the third leading cause of blindness, after cataracts and macular degeneration. Unlike cataracts though, blindness caused by glaucoma is irreversible.

Can my glaucoma be treated?

The simple answer is that in most cases treatment is possible. However, no treatment is prescribed if there is no damage to the optic nerve. On the other hand, your consultant may decide to offer treatment as a precaution, to avoid possible damage. There are various options available to your consultant and numerous different drugs available. Because glaucoma is a lifelong condition it is likely that a drug may lose its effectiveness and therefore an alternative may need to be prescribed. In any event, the goal of your doctor is to lower the pressure in your eye either by decreasing the amount of fluid produced or by increasing the drainage.

Will I need surgery?

Possibly, but it does depend on how your condition progresses. If medication does not help, you may need more direct action and this would be either laser treatment or traditional surgery. Your consultant will discuss this with you.

Will it affect my ability to drive?

If you have been diagnosed with glaucoma, you need to tell the DVLA (Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency) who may arrange for a special visual field test (called an Estermann) through an optician.

Telling the DVLA does not necessarily mean you will be stopped from driving, but it is a requirement to let them know.

Healthy eating and being active

Information and advice on healthy eating and becoming more active is available from:

- One You Eat Better (website) - includes Easy Meals app for healthy meals and the Change4Life Food Scanner to help reduce levels of sugar in your diet.
- Better Health -Get Active (website) - includes tips on getting active for all, including the downloadable Active 10 app, as well as tailored advice for those living with a long-term condition

Find out your BMI

You can get help to lead a healthier lifestyle. If it's too high, sign up for a programme that will help you lose weight.

The NHS 12 week fitness plan will support your weight loss plan as well as improve your health. This is aimed at beginners and will help get you into the habit of regular exercise over the course of the programme. It is structured but flexible enough to allow you to fit the exercise sessions around your other weekly commitments.

What should I do if my health is deteriorating?

If you are worried about your eye you after you have attended the clinic please contact the department.

There are various other factors that can lead to glaucoma. These are listed below;

Age - chronic glaucoma becomes more likely as you get older, affecting about 1% of people who are between the ages of 40-65, and 5% of people who are over 65 years of age.

Ethnic origin - people of African, or Afro-Caribbean origin, tend to have a greater chance of developing chronic glaucoma. Also, people of Asian origin are more likely to develop acute glaucoma.

Short sightedness - people who are short-sighted are more likely to develop chronic glaucoma.

Family history - if you have a close relative, such as a parent, brother, or sister who has glaucoma, you may also have an increased chance of developing the condition yourself. Therefore, to find out if there is glaucoma hereditary risks in your family, you should have regular eye tests in order to monitor the condition of your eyes.

Medical history - research suggests that people with diabetes are also more likely to develop glaucoma than those without the condition.

Urgent Health Advice

For urgent health advice about physical or mental health, when it's not an emergency, please call 111 from any landline or mobile phone. You can also visit www.nhs.uk

The NHS 111 service is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Life Threatening Emergencies

For something life threatening –severe bleeding, breathing difficulties or chest pains –please dial 999.

Contact Us

Peterborough Hospital 01733 678000

Hinchingbrooke Hospital 01480 416416

Stamford 01733 678000