

# Glaucoma



## What is glaucoma?

Glaucoma is a condition in which the nerve cells that transmit information from the eye to the brain become damaged. This prevents visual information from getting from the retina in the eye to the brain. Glaucoma is often associated with a build-up of pressure in the eye. The anterior eye is normally filled with fluid, that is constantly being replaced. If excessive amounts of fluid are produced, or if it cannot be drained properly, the pressure inside the eye can increase. In some forms of glaucoma, the pressure inside the eye can become extremely high, while in other forms the pressure may remain normal.

## What causes glaucoma?

The exact causes of glaucoma are not known. In some cases the drainage network of the eye may not be formed properly, or may become blocked by natural materials or due to injury. In other cases there is no clear cause.

## Would glaucoma lead to serious damage?

If untreated, glaucoma can cause blindness. As the nerve cells are progressively damaged, the ability to see objects in different parts of the visual field is lost. This can progress until only central vision is left, or until the person is completely blind. The longer the disease is left unmanaged, the greater is the likelihood of damage.

## How could I know if I have glaucoma?

Often a person will not be aware that he has glaucoma until it is too late. Usually there are no symptoms until permanent damage has occurred. In some cases the increased pressure in the eye will cause blurred vision, seeing coloured rings around lights, loss of peripheral vision, pain and redness of the eye.

## How is glaucoma diagnosed?

The optometrist looks at the nerve fibres at the back of the eye, measures the pressure in the eye and tests the field of vision. These tests are simple and painless.

## How is glaucoma managed?

Eye drops and medicine are used to treat glaucoma initially. Sometimes surgery is necessary if the blockage in the drainage system cannot be removed by other means.

## Can glaucoma be prevented?

No. Early detection and management is the best way of controlling glaucoma and reducing vision loss.

## Who is likely to be affected by glaucoma?

People over the age of 40 years are far more likely to have glaucoma than younger people. In addition, glaucoma tends to run in the families. People with a blood relative who has suffered from glaucoma and people over 40 years of age are at risk and should have their eyes tested regularly by an optometrist.

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### Office hours

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