Kent Association for the Blind

Glaucoma

What is glaucoma?

Glaucoma is the name for a group of eye conditions where the optic nerve is damaged by increased pressure in the eye. Chronic Open Angle Glaucoma is the most common type of the condition, affecting about 2% of people over 40 in the UK, rising to 10% in people over 75.

The eye contains a watery fluid called the aqueous humour that keeps the lens and other parts of the eye clean and healthy. This fluid is circulated around the eye and then drains away through tiny channels near the front of the eye. If the fluid can't drain away or if too much is produced, this increases the pressure in the eye which can damage the optic nerve and affect your sight.

Glaucoma can be managed effectively with medical treatment but it cannot be cured, and reversing the sight which is lost is not possible. With early diagnosis, the vast majority of people who develop glaucoma will keep life-long useful sight.

How glaucoma affects sight

- The edge of your field of vision may start to fade, so you may not be able to see things to the side of you.
- You may also develop blank areas near your central vision.

Spotting the signs

Pressure in the eye usually increases very slowly, so loss of vision is also often slow. If only your side vision is affected, you will still be able to read and may not notice that anything is wrong. This is why it's important to get your eyes tested regularly. Tests are straightforward and painless. The three main tests that are used are:

- A measurement of your intraocular (eye) pressures.
- A visual field test using flashing lights.
- An examination of the back of the eye where the optic nerve meets the eye.

Reducing the risk

- Regular eye tests
  Glaucoma often runs in families, so if you have a blood relation with the condition it is important to get your eyes tested regularly and to let your eye specialist know about your family history. Eye tests

are free for people over 40 who also have a close family history of glaucoma.
- Maintain a healthy blood pressure
  Blood pressure that is very high can lead to an increase in the intraocular pressure in your eyes, whilst low blood pressure can cause problems due to insufficient blood supply to the optic nerve.

Living with glaucoma

Some ways to stay independent and active if you have glaucoma are:

- Using good lighting without glare.
- Reducing glare by wearing sunglasses (carrying a CE Mark) or a brimmed hat.
- Using contrasting colours.
- Using a Typoscope to reduce glare when reading.
- Standing still and moving your head to look around a room before moving forward.
- Moving your head to look around a surface before reaching to pick up an item.

Treatment

It is important to diagnose glaucoma early as treatment can prevent further deterioration, if any has already occurred.

Treatment aims to lower the pressure in the eye, or improve the drainage of fluid from the eye, using eye drops, tablets, or an operation. You should discuss treatment options with your Consultant Ophthalmologist.

Help to manage sight loss

KAB's specialist teams provide a range of services to help visually impaired people, of all ages, to be independent, safe and mobile. Our support includes mobility training so you can get around safely, help to learn new techniques so you can carry out everyday tasks like making a drink or cooking dinner.

We can also give you advice about specialist equipment that can help you make the best use of your remaining vision.

KAB also offers help, information and awareness training to professionals, employers, families and carers. This can help them understand the needs of people around them who have sight impairments. Contact us on 01622 691357 or email enquiry@kab.org.uk

Other useful contacts

Glaucoma UK
Helpline 01233 64 81 70
Open 9.30am - 5pm (Monday - Friday)
helpline@glaucoma.uk

Retina UK
Helpline 0300 111 4000
helpline@RetinaUK.org.uk
www.retinauk.org.uk

For information about good eye health, visit our help and advice pages on our website: www.kab.org.uk

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To receive KAB Connect, email us at **enquiry@kab.org.uk** or call us on **01622 691357**. It is available in many different formats, including large print, audio, email and Braille.

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