

GLAUCOMA

Your optometrist is concerned that you may have glaucoma. Glaucoma is a condition whereby the pressure inside the eye is elevated and this causes compression of the nerve at the back of the eye. You can lose small patches of your peripheral vision if it is left untreated. This loss of peripheral vision is silent and you will not notice it as your brain will fill in the gaps for you. It is usually only picked up on the visual field test (the bowl with the lights that flash up and the button to press).

So in glaucoma we see: High pressure, changes in the optic nerve (it can “bow” out due to the compression called “cupping”) and visual field test abnormalities.

Whilst the majority of patients have high pressure, about a quarter actually have normal pressures but still develop the changes of glaucoma.

Your optometrist has referred you either because your pressure has measured high or the nerve at the back of your eye looks suspicious (with or without high pressure). Sometimes the visual field test abnormality can be the only finding.

The good news is that the prognosis is excellent. If we see you and decide that you do not have glaucoma then we can discharge you back to your optometrist for regular review. Even if you do not have glaucoma at that stage you can still develop it later so you must see your optometrist regularly. If we are a bit worried about you we may bring you back a few times for follow-up appointments to repeat the tests and see if anything changes.

If we decide you do have glaucoma we will treat you – this treatment usually involves putting in some drops (often just once a night) into the affected eye(s). We will have to bring you back to the hospital quite frequently (once or twice a year) for life but if you remain stable (which most do) these will only need to be quick visits.

Hopefully you will not have glaucoma but even if you do it is not a disaster as, with the help of your optometrist, we usually pick it up very early.