

## **What is Glaucoma?**

Last week was National Glaucoma Awareness Week, so it's timely to consider what glaucoma is and how it could affect us. You may know someone who has glaucoma or is related to someone with it and yet you may not know what it is?

Glaucoma is the name for a group of eye conditions leading to damage to the optic nerve at the back of the eye. This nerve carries information from the light sensitive layer in your eye, the retina, to the brain where it is perceived as a picture. Glaucoma is generally totally painless. The only way to ensure you do not have glaucoma is to have regular eye examinations.

### **The risks**

If left untreated glaucoma can reduce your vision and eventually lead to blindness. A reduced field of vision can happen so gradually that you are unlikely to notice. This can be due to pressure on the optic nerve from increased pressure inside the eye. We are at greater risk with age or if we have a close family relative with the disease. It is known to affect around two percent of the population over the age of 40. The risk increases once we reach 65, when five percent may be affected.

### **How is it detected?**

Eye pressure is largely independent of blood pressure and it is often measured using the 'puffer' test – when a puff of air is aimed at the front of your eye. If the pressure appears to be high, further tests will be necessary to determine whether treatment for glaucoma is needed. These may include a 'field test' to assess whether there has been any loss to your peripheral vision. Certain changes in the appearance of the optic nerve may also be a sign of glaucoma so a comprehensive eye examination will always include a thorough look at the back of your eyes.

### **Treatment**

Modern medication can keep glaucoma under control and slow down or even stop the progressive loss of vision. Therefore early detection is important.

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