

My sight is fine – why test for glaucoma

Are you over 40?

Is glaucoma in your family?

Are you African-Caribbean?

Are you short sighted?

Do you have diabetes?

If the answer is yes to any of these questions, you definitely should have your eyes tested regularly.

Primary open angle glaucoma (POAG) has no symptoms, but slowly and painlessly it destroys sight if it is not detected and treated. The loss of vision cannot be reversed. It mainly affects the middle aged and elderly, although it can develop in younger people. The earlier glaucoma is detected, the more successful the treatment.

Even if you seem to have excellent sight, this doesn't rule out glaucoma because:

- POAG initially destroys the off-centre vision, leaving the central detailed vision unaffected until a late stage
- POAG generally starts in one eye first and blank patches in the field of vision may go unnoticed as the less affected eye 'completes the picture' for the worse eye
- POAG does not affect the ability of the eye to focus and may be present even though vision is fine without the need for glasses.

You could lose a considerable amount of sight irretrievably before you are aware of a problem.

The only way you can know for certain whether or not you have glaucoma is to arrange to have a sight test which includes all three glaucoma tests. These tests are rapid and painless. They are:

1. **Ophthalmoscopy** : Viewing the optic nerve using an ophthalmoscope (special torch)
2. **Tonometry** : Measuring the pressure within the eye
3. **Perimetry** : Testing the field of vision

A combination of all three tests has been shown to increase the likelihood of detecting chronic glaucoma by four times when compared with ophthalmoscopy alone. If your optician/optometrist is not willing or able to perform all three tests, then find one that is. However, the optometrist can make a charge for carrying out tonometry and perimetry even if the rest of the test is paid for by the NHS, so it is also worth checking this when arranging a test.

If you have a brother, sister, parent or child with glaucoma and you are aged over 40, you are entitled to a free eye test under the NHS. Ask for the relevant form (GOS 1) when you book an appointment. You will still need to ensure that all three tests are carried out.

Treatment for chronic glaucoma is usually with eyedrops. Laser treatment or surgery may be necessary in some cases. The good news is that once it is detected and treated, most people retain good usable vision for a lifetime.

Glaucoma left untreated may lead to tunnel vision and, eventually, to blindness. It is estimated that approximately 2% of people over the age of 40 will have glaucoma. 13% of those on the blind register have glaucoma of some type.

Don't be a statistic – give yourself peace of mind. Arrange an eye test today!