

## WHAT IS PRIMARY OPEN ANGLE GLAUCOMA?

It is the second leading cause of blindness in the world. It usually occurs in persons over 40 years old however it can be found at any age. Fortunately loss of sight from glaucoma is often preventable if you get treatment early enough.

High pressure inside the eye is a risk factor for developing glaucoma, although some people with normal eye pressures can develop the disease.

Glaucoma is a disease of the optic nerve, which carries the images that we see from the eye to the brain. The optic nerve is made up of more than one million nerve fibers. The nerve fibers resemble an electric cable containing a large number of wires. Glaucoma can damage these nerve fibers, causing blind spots to develop in your vision.

Usually people with glaucoma will not notice these blind spot areas in their vision until a large amount of the optic nerve has been damaged. If the entire nerve is destroyed, blindness results.

## WHAT CAUSES GLAUCOMA?

Clear liquid, called the aqueous humor, circulates inside the eye and is necessary to keep the eye firm. A small amount of this fluid is produced constantly, and an equal amount flows out of the eye through a drainage system located at the angle of the eye. If the drainage angle of the eye is

blocked, excess fluid cannot flow out of the eye and the pressure rises and this can give rise to glaucoma.

## WHAT SYMPTOMS MAY YOU GET WITH GLAUCOMA?

Blurred vision, however the vision is normally good until the glaucoma is quite advanced.

Eye pain and headache is uncommon in open angle glaucoma

Rainbow haloes around lights

Nausea and vomiting

## HOW IS GLAUCOMA DETECTED?

Regular eye examinations by your ophthalmologist or optician are the best way to detect glaucoma. An ophthalmologist is a medical doctor. Your ophthalmologist can detect and treat glaucoma.

During a complete and painless examination, your ophthalmologist will:

Measure your intra ocular pressure (tonometry);

Inspect the drainage angle of your eye (gonioscopy);

Examine the optic nerve (ophthalmoscopy);

The ophthalmologist may refer you for a visual field assessment (perimetry).

## THE MOST IMPORTANT RISK FACTORS INCLUDE:

Age over 40 years old

African ancestry

A family history of glaucoma

Past injuries to the eyes

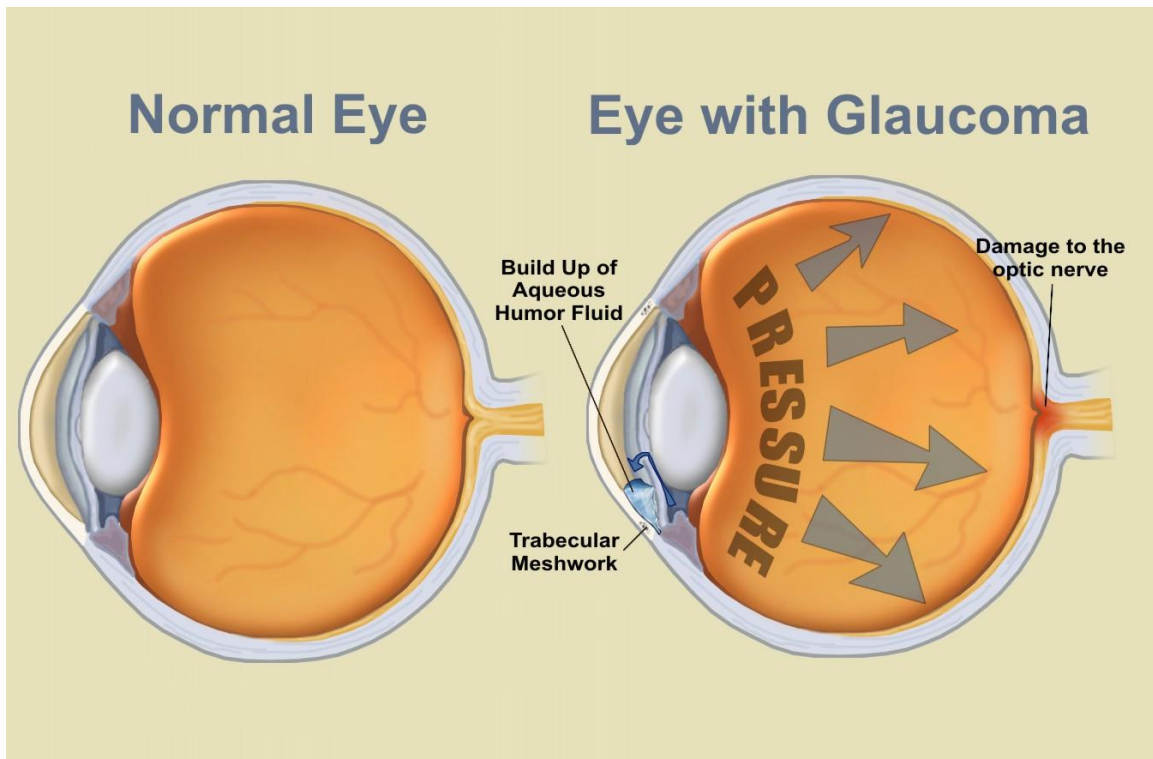
Persons with diabetes and high blood pressure are thought to be at increased risk of developing glaucoma

## HOW IS GLAUCOMA TREATED?

As a rule, damage caused by glaucoma cannot be reversed. Usually the initial treatment is eye drops. If the pressure is not controlled we can add pills or perform laser and surgical operations.

With any type of glaucoma, regular eye examinations are very important to prevent vision loss. Because glaucoma can worsen without your being aware of it, your treatment may also need to be changed over time.

Image showing the damage caused to the optic nerve by a rise in the eye pressure.



The eye center, Eugene, Oregon, USA, kindly provided the image.

Dr Donald Swaby FRCOphth  
Consultant Ophthalmologist