Glaucoma The Good News

If you are reading this, then the chances are you have just received a diagnosis of glaucoma. It is also likely that before you went to have your eyes tested, you didn’t realise that there was anything wrong. We, at the International Glaucoma Association, know that for most people, a diagnosis of glaucoma is a tremendous shock. You will probably have a number of worries and fears about some of the tests and how to use eye drops. This leaflet attempts to answer some of your questions.

There is no escaping from the fact that glaucoma can cause blindness, but once it is diagnosed and treated early the vast majority of people never go blind. It is untreated or undetected glaucoma that does the damage. More than 95% of people diagnosed today will retain adequate sight for the rest of their lives and there is every likelihood that you will be one of them. In short, the good news is your diagnosis has been made.

Unfortunately about half of those with glaucoma in this country don’t know they have the condition and are therefore at risk of losing sight.

What happens now?
While it is a good idea to learn as much as you can about your glaucoma, the golden rule in preventing loss of sight to glaucoma is to take your glaucoma drops. There are many different drops that may be used to control your glaucoma and your ophthalmologist will try to choose a drop or drops that will stop any further damage to your field of vision, without having too much impact on your daily life. This may mean changes in your medication over the first few visits. If so, don’t worry it is just a matter of balancing your individual treatment to your individual condition.

Learning how to take your drops properly is vitally important. There are several different techniques and there will be one that suits you. It is largely a matter of trial and error, but if you are having difficulty, ask as there are many tips, tricks and different aids that can make the task a little easier. (Please ask for a copy of the IGA’s ‘Glaucoma A Guide’ or ask for the IGA’s ‘Eye Drops and Dispensing Aids’ booklet where there is detailed advice on drop instillation with pictures to help).
Once you have learnt to get the drops into your eyes, it is just as important to take them at the right time. Some drops are used just once a day, but others may need to be taken two or three times a day. Get to know your drops and get into a routine so that you don’t forget. It is important to use your drops as prescribed on a daily basis. This will help reduce the risk of further loss of vision. Try to fit the treatment into your normal daily routine. If you have problems managing the drops or feel they may be upsetting you, discuss this with your clinic.

Glaucoma is a lifelong condition, but the control is very effective and the IGA has many examples of people having had glaucoma for thirty or more years who still see well. The treatments work, but only if you take them.

Who to tell
While there may be no known history of glaucoma in your family, there is a clear hereditary factor and if you have been diagnosed then your first degree blood relatives (parents, brothers, sisters and children) will be at increased risk of developing the condition. You won’t have given them glaucoma, it is not a condition that can be caught, but by letting them know about your glaucoma you may make the difference between perfectly useful sight for life and serious visual impairment. (Please ask for the IGA leaflet ‘Glaucoma and Your Relatives’).

If you are a driver and you have glaucoma in both eyes, then you also have to inform the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority (DVLA). It is very important to be clear about your diagnosis because, if you only have glaucoma in one eye, or if you have the precursor condition called ocular hypertension, it is not necessary to let the DVLA know. However, if you do have glaucoma in both eyes, it does not necessarily mean you have to stop driving, but it does mean you will have to undergo a special field of vision test to determine if you are safe to drive.

(Please ask for the IGA leaflet ‘Driving and Glaucoma’.)
What happens next?

It is important the progress and stability of your glaucoma are monitored regularly. At these routine appointments the eye specialist will look at the condition of the inside of your eyes to look for signs of change. They will also check the level of your intraocular pressure (the pressure inside your eye) to ensure the treatment is working. Sometimes, (depending on the other results), you may be asked to carry out a test to look for any changes in your field of vision. Other additional tests may also be requested. As a full glaucoma clinic appointment including the tests can be tiring it is an idea to get a good night’s rest before a clinic appointment. All of these tests are so the eye specialist can decide whether your glaucoma is stable (no change) or progressing, in which case it may be necessary to alter your treatment.

These routine appointments will occur throughout your lifetime with glaucoma and it is very important to attend for your appointments as this is the only time when an expert can make sure everything is working as it should. Don’t forget that as a rule, you won’t be aware of changes in your pressure or field of vision so try not to miss appointments.

Final thoughts

A diagnosis of glaucoma is often frightening, there will be times when you have questions or worries about your condition. Keep this leaflet and when you are unsure about something, please don’t hesitate to ring our Sightline here at the IGA. We have specially trained staff who spend all of their time answering questions about glaucoma.

They will be delighted to hear from you and will be able to give you answers to most questions straight away. If something is really difficult they also have access to many of the top glaucoma specialists in this country and elsewhere whom they can ask to help. Always remember, the only stupid question is the one you don’t ask!
For more information
For a free information pack, or to discuss your glaucoma, please call Sightline on 01233 64 81 70

International Glaucoma Association
Woodcote House
15 Highpoint Business Village
Henwood, Ashford
Kent TN24 8DH

Administration: 01233 64 81 64
Email: info@iga.org.uk
Website: www.glaucoma-association.com

A full list of references and information sources used in the compilation of this leaflet is available on request by phone: 01233 64 81 70 (Sightline) or by email: info@iga.org.uk

Formed in 1974, the IGA has the mission to raise awareness of glaucoma, promote research related to early diagnosis and treatment and to provide support to patients and all those who care for them. Funded entirely by its members and donors (no government or statutory funding) the Association provides its services free of charge to anyone in need of assistance.

If you found this leaflet helpful and would like to support our work, please contact us on 01233 64 81 64 or visit www.glaucoma-association.com to make a donation or become a member (benefits: quarterly magazine, invitations to patient meetings, support research).

This leaflet has been provided to you free of charge thanks to the voluntary donations of our members and friends.

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Author: David Wright FIAM
Medical Editor: Ian Murdoch MSc MD FRCS MBBS BSc Hons

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