

Mr Anthony G Tyers

FRCS FRCSEd FRCOphth

New Hall Hospital Bodenham Salisbury Wiltshire SP5 4EY

Secretary tel: 01722 439680/422333 fax: 01722 410143

GLAUCOMA

Q *What is glaucoma?*

A The eye has a natural pressure within it which keeps it 'eye-shaped'. Without this internal pressure it would collapse like a deflated football. The eye works best if the pressure is kept within fairly narrow limits. If it rises above the normal pressure range glaucoma is present.

Q *What effect does glaucoma have on the eye?*

A If the pressure is not treated the vision is gradually lost - usually over several years. The loss of vision starts in the 'visual field' - the peripheral part of vision to the sides.

Q *How do I know if I have glaucoma?*

A Glaucoma is not painful and it causes no symptoms apart from very gradual loss of vision which can go undetected for years. It is usually found incidentally by opticians when we attend for a routine check for glasses, or if we attend the local hospital eye department for another reason.

Q *How is glaucoma treated?*

A The first treatment is almost always eye drops. If these are not strong enough to bring the pressure in the eye back to normal surgery may need to be considered.

Q *Do the drops for glaucoma have any side effects?*

A Yes. Some of the drops do have side effects and these will be discussed with you when they are prescribed. Some drops can affect certain general health conditions such as asthma so alternative drops would always be prescribed in this situation.

Q *How effective is glaucoma treatment?*

A It is very effective. However, the treatment only works if the drops are taken regularly as prescribed. It can be easy to forget to take them. An occasional missed dose does not matter but regular omission of the drops will lead to progression of the glaucoma and eventually loss of vision.

Q *How do I know if my glaucoma is fully treated?*

A You will be seen in the hospital eye department at regular intervals. Your eye pressures will be checked at every visit and your vision will be assessed at regular intervals to identify any slight loss. This is done with an instrument that measures the visual field of each eye. The treatment will be adjusted as necessary to maintain good control.

Q *Is all glaucoma the same?*

A No. There are many different causes and types of glaucoma. Some are associated with other diseases of the eyes but the most common type is 'chronic simple glaucoma'.

Q *Can glaucoma run in families?*

A Yes. Some forms of glaucoma appear in family members of glaucoma sufferers. They should have their eyes and eye pressures checked from time to time throughout adult life. This is usually done by opticians during routine visits for glasses checks.

Q *Is the eye pressure always raised in glaucoma?*

A No. Although most forms of glaucoma have a raised eye pressure a small number of people with glaucoma have normal pressures but still suffer the effects on vision. This is called, 'normal pressure glaucoma' or 'low tension glaucoma'. It is also usually identified incidentally at a routine visit to the optician. It is treated in the same way as other glaucoma.

Q *What is 'ocular hypertension'?*

A Although the normal eye pressure in most people falls within a certain range a few people have higher pressures but are still normal - there is no other sign that they have glaucoma. Treatment is not usually prescribed in this situation. They are labelled 'glaucoma suspects' and seen from time to time in the eye clinic. Treatment is started if the pressure rises further or if any sign of true glaucoma appears.

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