

# UNDERSTANDING GLAUCOMA

**Take Action Now  
Before you have Glaucoma  
Damage to your Eyes**

## GET TESTED



## KNOW THE FACTS

### WHAT IS GLAUCOMA?

**Glaucoma is the leading cause of irreversible blindness worldwide and affects over 70 million people of all races and social classes.**

Glaucoma is a group of eye diseases where pressure in the eye damages the optic nerve. The optic nerve is essential for sight because it carries all the information from your eye to your brain. Once the optic nerve has been damaged, it cannot be repaired.

In glaucoma, there are usually no symptoms or warnings signs and so it has been described as the "silent thief of sight". Up to 90% of people who have glaucoma are not even aware that they have it. If left untreated, glaucoma causes permanent loss of vision and may lead to blindness.

### HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE GLAUCOMA?

**In most cases, glaucoma does not cause any signs or symptoms that you will notice until your vision has been significantly affected.**

This is why it is so important to visit your eye care specialist regularly so that he/she can detect glaucoma before the optic nerve has been severely damaged. Some of the symptoms of severe glaucoma are shown in the diagram.

### WHAT CAUSES GLAUCOMA?

**Glaucoma occurs when the pressure inside a person's eye is too high for their optic nerve to handle.**

In most cases the pressure is high due to a blocked drainage system, but some people can develop glaucoma even if their pressure is normal.

### IS THERE A CURE FOR GLAUCOMA?

**Glaucoma unfortunately usually cannot be cured and requires lifelong treatment.**

Because of this, early detection of glaucoma is essential to improve the chances of preventing vision loss and blindness in later life.

### WHAT TREATMENTS ARE AVAILABLE FOR GLAUCOMA?

**The management of glaucoma often requires various, multiple, and ongoing treatments.**

Treatment involves lowering the pressure in the eye by using eye drops, lasers and/or surgery to halt or slow-down any further vision loss.

### PREVENTATIVE MEASURES AGAINST GLAUCOMA

**Currently there is no effective prevention for most types of glaucoma.**

Living a healthy lifestyle helps prevent certain types of glaucoma.

### WHAT ARE THE RISK FACTORS FOR GLAUCOMA?

**Anyone can suffer from glaucoma.**

Risk factors for glaucoma include:

- 👁️ Medical diseases, e.g. diabetes, high blood pressure, migraine
- 👁️ Tablets or eye drops containing cortisone
- 👁️ Close family members with glaucoma
- 👁️ Being short or far sighted
- 👁️ African or Asian descent
- 👁️ Age over 40 years
- 👁️ Eye injuries
- 👁️ Cataract

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**[www.sags.co.za](http://www.sags.co.za)**

## HOW DO THE EYE DROPS AND LASER WORK?

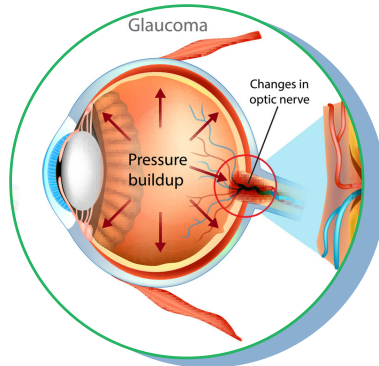
Eye drops and laser lower the pressure in the eye by reducing the amount of fluid in the eye.

They do this either by increasing the amount of fluid that drains out of your eye or reducing the amount of fluid that your eye produces.

## HOW DOES SURGERY WORK?

The ophthalmologist opens fluid drainage pathways to allow excess fluid to drain from the eye and lower the pressure.

With surgery, the ophthalmologist will either open up your natural ocular fluid drainage pathways or make an entirely new drainage system for your eye.



## QUESTIONS ABOUT USING EYE DROPS

### Do the drops have side effects?

Like all medications, drops may have some local or systemic side effects. Ask your ophthalmologist for the best option for you and be sure to inform them if you think your drops are causing side effects.

### What if I forget to use my drops?

It is important to keep the pressure inside the eye low because high pressure may cause permanent damage to your vision. If you forgot to use your drops, start using them immediately again as instructed.

### What is the best way of using the drops?

Take the right dose at the right time every day, as prescribed. Do not miss a dose and also do not increase the dose.

### What if I struggle to put the drops into my eye?

Some of the drops have useful drop instilling devices. These will assist you to make your daily routine much easier. An alternative is to consider a laser or surgical procedure.



## COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT GLAUCOMA

### Can I continue to drive?

The law requires you to have both good central vision and peripheral vision. To drive when you are unable to meet the standard is an offence and may invalidate your insurance.

It is best to confirm with your ophthalmologist whether your vision meets the standards.

### Will I go completely blind if I am diagnosed with glaucoma?

Providing you receive the correct treatment, use the drops or drugs as prescribed and attend your follow-up appointments and checks, the risk of blindness is low.

### Besides glaucoma drops, can I do anything else?

Daily exercise, a healthy diet, and avoiding smoking can lower eye pressure and protect your optic nerve from damage.

## MEDICAL AIDS AND GLAUCOMA

**Glaucoma is one of the chronic diseases included in the 270 Prescribed Minimum Benefit (PMB) conditions.**

Medical aids are required by law to pay for a predefined number of consultations, diagnostic tests and treatments required for the management of PMB conditions such as glaucoma. This law also applies to Hospital plans. Be sure to register your glaucoma diagnosis as a PMB with your medical aid.

## SOME IMPORTANT REMINDERS

- 👁️ If you have any glaucoma risk factors or symptoms mentioned above, you should go for an eye examination and pressure check at least once a year, GET TESTED!
- 👁️ If you have been diagnosed with glaucoma, inform your relatives so that they can also go for an eye examination.
- 👁️ You should never stop using your medication without first consulting with your ophthalmologist. Once you start using treatment, DO NOT STOP YOUR TREATMENT!
- 👁️ Visit your eye care specialist as directed, DO NOT MISS A VISIT!



### SUPPORT FOR GLAUCOMA SUFFERERS

There are a number of external organisations who support people with glaucoma including:

### The International Glaucoma Association

[www.glaucoma-association.com](http://www.glaucoma-association.com)

### The Glaucoma Foundation

[www.glaucomafoundation.org](http://www.glaucomafoundation.org)

#### Acknowledgements:

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