

## Glaucoma treatment

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### Introduction

Glaucoma can be treated but not cured. The aim of treatment is to delay or, ideally, prevent progression of damage and sight loss.

This is achieved by lowering the pressure within the eye. Patients usually require eye drops only. Some patients will need tablets, laser treatment or surgery.

### Medical treatment

#### Eye drops

Generally, these are prescribed on an on-going basis for life.

It is important that you put them in correctly as prescribed. Drops may sting when first used, and some of the eye drops do have side effects. Sometimes these arise from the drops being absorbed too quickly into the blood stream. You can slow the absorption by pressing the forefinger of your free hand against the lower lid where it meets your nose, or close your eye for 60 seconds.

The doctor will not prescribe eye drops which have the potential to cause serious harm and will advise you of potential side effects.

If you notice breathlessness with any eye drops, stop them immediately and consult your GP. Please inform the clinic doctor if you have a heart or chest condition. Some drops are not suitable for asthmatics.

#### Tablets

Tablets of acetazolamide (Diamox®) may be given to patients to reduce the eye pressure.

The tablets may increase the amount of urine passed and the amount of salts leaving the body. This can cause some patients to experience tingling in their hands/feet or nausea and tiredness.

## Laser treatment

There are many different types of laser treatment for glaucoma as detailed below.

All but cyclodiode laser are performed as out-patient procedures in the clinic, involve sitting in front of a slit-lamp (see photograph below) and having a contact lens placed on your eye.

All laser treatments take approximately 15 minutes.



### 1. Laser iridotomy

This is indicated in patients with the 'angle-closure' type of glaucoma.

The laser beam is focused on the iris. A few applications of the laser beam are required to make a small hole in the iris, with the intention of making the drainage angle wider and/or reducing the eye pressure.

It is uncomfortable, but not very painful.

### 2. Laser trabeculoplasty

This is occasionally recommended for patients with the 'open-angle' type of glaucoma, for whom drops are not tolerated or have not been effective enough and for whom surgery is not appropriate.

The laser beam is focused on the trabecular meshwork.

It is painless.

### 3. Laser iridoplasty

This is sometimes performed on patients with the 'angle closure' type of glaucoma, if an iridotomy is not possible or has not been successful.

The laser beam is focused on the iris in such a way as to lead it to shrink slightly in several tiny areas, allowing the drainage angle to open wider.

It is mildly uncomfortable.

## 4. Selective laser trabeculoplasty

This is a recently developed technology, which works in a similar fashion to laser trabeculoplasty but can be repeated.

## 5. Cyclodiode laser

This is performed in the operating theatre under local anaesthetic (an injection behind the eye). The laser beam is focused on the ciliary body, which produces fluid within the eye. It is a very effective means of reducing pressure, but tends to be reserved for a relatively small number of patients in whom eye drops, other forms of laser or surgery are not indicated.

## Surgery

A minority of patients require surgery for glaucoma.

The most common operation is a trabeculectomy, where a small piece of tissue is removed to make a new opening for the aqueous fluid to escape from the eye. The escaping fluid is absorbed into the tissues, which form the outer coat of the eye.

Another procedure is insertion of a drainage tube into the eye.

### **PALS**

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern, call 01271 314090 or email [ndht.pals@nhs.net](mailto:ndht.pals@nhs.net). You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple.

## Have your say

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust aims to provide high quality services. However, please tell us when something could be improved. If you have a comment or compliment about a service or treatment, please raise your comments with a member of staff or the PALS team in the first instance.

'Care Opinion' comments forms are on all wards or online at [www.careopinion.org.uk](http://www.careopinion.org.uk).

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