

For Our Patients With Ocular Hypertension (High Eye Pressure)

Since we have diagnosed you with ocular hypertension it is important for you to understand the implication of this condition in regards to your future risk of developing glaucoma. The first point to make very clear is that ocular hypertension does NOT mean the same thing as glaucoma; thus for example if you have a “glaucoma screening” and all that was checked was your eye pressure this is insufficient to rule out the presence of glaucoma. High eye pressure is the greatest identifiable risk factor for the development of glaucoma but this measurement remains just that – a risk factor. There are many other risk factors that we cannot modify (i.e. – the presence of nearsightedness, family history of glaucoma, black race, advanced age, anatomic characteristics of your optic nerve), but we can do something about your eye pressure – lower it by medical or surgical means.

The Ocular Hypertension Treatment Study was a recently completed clinical trial of over 1600 patients with high eye pressure. The study was conducted in such a way as to try and identify risk factors for developing glaucomatous damage over a five year period and to determine what effect treatment of high eye pressure had on development of glaucoma. One unexpected risk factor for the disease was corneal thickness (the cornea is the clear front part of the eye and is the tissue that is indented to check intraocular pressure). What was found was that patients with thinner corneas were more at risk because pressure measurement is falsely lowered in these eyes. The key finding from the study concerning treatment of high eye pressure was that of the patients treated 4.4% developed glaucoma compared to 9.5% of untreated patients. Two obvious conclusions from this study are apparent – 1: The absolute risk of developing glaucoma was reduced by approximately 60% by treatment, but 2: The risk of developing glaucoma was only one in ten for UNTREATED eyes. Thus it is clear that treatment of your high eye pressure needs to be carefully individualized and all risk factors taken into consideration before committing you to potentially lifelong medications and surgical procedures. Also the limitations of the study must be considered as well – for example, patients with pressures between 24-32 were studied so if your pressure is higher your risk is naturally higher. As a part of your examination we will measure the corneal thickness as discussed above and also check the status of your optic nerve and peripheral vision via clinical exam and computerized visual field testing.

In conclusion, the treatment of ocular hypertension is a clinical decision made by your informed choice. Therefore, if you have any questions regarding your condition, please don't hesitate to discuss them with us.

Our office number is 928-855-5026.