



**Glaucoma
Australia**
Saving sight

Glaucoma News

Summer 2022 / No.83

Our vision is for Australians to be free of glaucoma blindness



World Glaucoma Week

Glaucoma Australia launches its new 7 Sights in 7 Days Challenge for World Glaucoma Week 2022

Glaucoma Australia has launched a new fundraising initiative, 7 Sights in 7 Days Challenge, encouraging Australians to share a photo of an amazing sight every day for seven days to raise funds to help end glaucoma blindness this World Glaucoma Week (6–12 March 2022).

The 7 Sights in 7 Days Challenge, part of Glaucoma Australia's annual Treat Your Eyes campaign, is asking Australians to capture everyday moments to remind them sight is precious while raising much-needed funds for early detection programs and critical support services.

Individuals and teams will be prompted to find, snap and share seven 'sights' during World Glaucoma Week, with daily themes such as 'quirky', 'artistic' and 'culture' to inspire their creativity. The challenge is designed to encourage people to get out and about, explore the visual beauty of their local area and raise money for an important cause.

Glaucoma is the leading cause of irreversible blindness worldwide. The disease affects 300,000 Australians, with 50 per cent unaware that they have the disease because they haven't had a comprehensive eye exam. There is no cure for glaucoma and vision loss is irreversible, making

1800 500 880
glaucoma.org.au

glaucoma@glaucoma.org.au
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From the CEO



Dear friends and supporters,

As we all emerge from a long time in Covid enforced hibernation, I'm looking forward to getting out and about in my beautiful

suburb by participating in the 7 Sights in 7 Days Challenge. I hope you have registered as I would love you to join me! World Glaucoma Week is the perfect time to launch this fundraising event and I look forward to watching it grow year after year.

This fun event is an extension of our popular 'Treat Your Eyes' campaign and encourages Aussies to 'look' at what they can 'see'! While you and I are acutely aware of our eye sight's value, most Aussies take their precious little peepers for granted. So we are inviting them to take a few minutes out of their day to find, snap and share beautiful images they see in their local area. They will be asked to imagine not seeing the wonderful sights all around them because they didn't find out they had glaucoma until it was too late, and encouraged to get their eyes tested if not done so in the previous two years. Fundraising efforts will help end glaucoma blindness through early detection, better treatment outcomes and ground-breaking research.

Wishing you all the very best.

Annie Gibbins
CEO

Cover Story

Continued from page 1

early detection and treatment key to saving sight.

Glaucoma Australia CEO Annie Gibbins says, "Anyone can develop glaucoma and the risk increases with age. About 1 in 10,000 babies are born with glaucoma; by age 40 about 1 in 200 have glaucoma, rising to 1 in 8 at age 80. Sight is incredibly precious and all too often, it's something people don't think about until something goes wrong. But Australians have the power to save their sight by getting their eyes tested and raising funds for ground-breaking research, education, and support programs.

"The Treat Your Eyes campaign began as an awareness initiative highlighting the importance of getting an eye check to identify the early signs of glaucoma. The inaugural 7 Sights in 7 Days Challenge is amplifying that sight-saving message by asking the community to get creative and fundraise so that we can take glaucoma out of the picture."

Glaucoma Australia ambassador and Aussie music legend Kirk Pengilly is throwing his support behind the 7 Sights in 7 Days Challenge. He says it's a potent reminder that your sight enables you to do things you may take for granted, such as going for a run, riding a bike, snapping a photo, or simply seeing your loved ones.

"Vision loss is largely preventable through early detection, treatment adherence and by supporting the work of our Australian researchers in the fight against this insidious disease," says Annie Gibbins.

To find out how to register for the 7 Sights in 7 Days Challenge or to sponsor someone who is snapping, visit: sevensights.org.au

7 Sights in 7 Day Challenge is an initiative of Glaucoma Australia and is supported by our Platinum Sponsor, MyHealth1st Gold Sponsors, Mivision, Shopper – Australia's leading specialist in retail out-of-home advertising, and Nova Eye Medical and Silver Sponsors, OPSM, Laubman & Pank, Bausch + Lomb and Specsavers. ●

To learn more and register, go to:
www.sevensights.org.au

World Glaucoma Week

Shannon Davis completely blindsided by his glaucoma diagnosis



Health-conscious father-of-two Shannon Davis sadly now understands why glaucoma is commonly referred to as the silent thief of sight.

With no known family history of glaucoma and the only one in his family without prescription spectacles, 45-year-old Shannon had his eyes checked after wondering why he wouldn't need them when most of his friends and family wore them. The check-up revealed that he was legally blind.

"I was shocked, confused when I was told I had a severe chronic disease (that I knew nothing about) and that it was already very advanced in its progression," says Shannon. "This meant I had already irreversibly lost a large amount of my vision in both eyes and had very little vision left to play with for the remainder of my life. With no prospect of medical improvement to my vision I was advised I was legally blind and I could no longer drive.

"I know you're thinking, how does this happen? So did I! What was happening is the mind does a phenomenal job of compensating for the actual visual deficit and damage to the optic nerve by filling in the blanks with what it thinks should be in your peripheral visual field. I had no idea that this was happening."

Shannon's shocking diagnosis and permanent disablement was debilitating and led to him medically retiring from work. However the unconditional support of his loving family and exemplary medical care available in Australia meant not all hope was lost. With his ophthalmologist's guidance and surgical interventions, Shannon has now lowered his eye pressures and slowed down further progression of his glaucoma and the loss of sight.

"I have recovered from my surgeries and made my peace with the knowledge that the condition may continue to slowly deteriorate, and there is no prospect for any improvement in my vision," says Shannon. "It's about understanding how I can lead a full and enjoyable life with significant disability, with the acceptance that my life will be different."

Shannon's glaucoma journey demonstrates that an individual's eye health is not defined by whether you do or do not need prescription glasses. Regular eye checks need to be prioritised like other areas of overall health, such as dental, as loss of sight can be prevented through early detection.

Shannon hopes Glaucoma Australia's new fundraising initiative, 7 Sights in 7 Days Challenge, will encourage Australians to place high value on their sight and be proactive with regular eye exams. The initiative involves sharing a photo of an amazing sight every day for seven days to raise funds to help end glaucoma blindness this World Glaucoma Week (6–12 March 2022).

The 7 Sights in 7 Days Challenge, part of Glaucoma Australia's annual Treat Your Eyes campaign, is asking Australians to capture everyday moments to remind them sight is precious while raising much-needed funds for early detection programs and critical support services.

"People tend to take their overall health for granted until something goes wrong. Glaucoma and your overall visual health are not a trivial matter. It needs to be given greater priority in people's health management. In Australia we are fortunate to have access to some of the best medical expertise and resources in the world, so use it! Get your eyes checked and protect your vision," adds Shannon. ●

Glaucoma patient Kelly Mercieca is living life to the full



Although she had no known family history of glaucoma, Kelly Mercieca was diagnosed with congenital glaucoma at five months old, after her mother insisted that something about her watery eyes didn't seem right.

Kelly, now 47, had surgery at just six months old to minimise the damage that occurred when her iris was stretched in the womb due to glaucoma. She now lives with full vision in her left eye and partial vision in her right eye thanks to ongoing support and guidance from her ophthalmologist.

"Since I was seven the focus of my treatment has been keeping my eyes comfortable by maintaining regular eye drops. This has been the main reason I haven't needed surgery since I was four months."

Kelly has faced challenges due to her affected sight, but she hasn't let that get in the way of living her life. Kelly has always maintained that you need to live your life to the full every day by doing the things you love and following your dreams.

"My mum didn't stop me from playing sport – I played netball – and I was not held back from engaging in activities due to my impaired vision. My parents didn't treat me differently to my three other siblings. When I was a kid, I used to dream about driving! I got my Ls as soon as I could and my Ps without hesitation."

Kelly does not take her independence for granted and attributes her eye health today to constant adherence to a good diet and regular ophthalmology appointments.

"Every time I get my eyes tested at my ophthalmologist, I feel nervous in case there has been changes that might affect my independence," she reveals. "But I am super determined and have confidence in my abilities. I know no matter what is thrown at me, I will still conquer."

Kelly's positive attitude to her congenital glaucoma diagnosis and life is infectious. She advises others with the condition to ensure they seek out support, so they know they are not alone.

"Finding like-minded people to help you grieve, share and remain authentic around your feelings is important. It's particularly important around the loss of sight and how it has or will affect your life. You need to process and grieve, to allow you to live your life honestly and to its fullest potential."

Kelly hopes Glaucoma Australia's new fundraising initiative, the 7 Sights in 7 Days Challenge, will encourage Australians to place a higher value on their sight and help end glaucoma blindness this World Glaucoma Week (6-12 March 2022).

The 7 Sights in 7 Days Challenge, part of Glaucoma Australia's annual Treat Your Eyes campaign, is asking Australians to capture a series of photos of everyday moments in their local surroundings to remind them that sight is precious while raising much-needed funds for early detection programs and critical support services.

"I hope people make the time to go and get their eyes checked. Thanks to my regular eye exams, and my very determined mother, I have been able to live my life to its fullest. I am grateful for my sight and the extraordinary experiences my sight has given me," Kelly added. ●

Diabetes medications linked to glaucoma prevention



Written by Penn Medicine News

A popular class of diabetes medications called GLP-1R agonists (Trulicity and Rybelsus) may also protect against glaucoma in diabetic patients, according to a new study led by researchers in the Scheie Eye Institute at the University of Pennsylvania's Perelman School of Medicine. The findings were published in the British Journal of Ophthalmology.

The researchers looked at retrospective data of 1,961 diabetic patients who were new users of this class of drugs and matched them to 4,371 unexposed control subjects. After 150 days on average, 10 patients in the medicated group were newly diagnosed with glaucoma (0.5 percent) compared to 58 patients (1.3 percent) in the control group. The findings suggest that GLP-1 receptor agonists may decrease a diabetic patient's risk of developing glaucoma by half.

The findings are supported by a Penn Medicine

study from 2020, which found that GLP-1R agonists reduced neuroinflammation and prevented retinal ganglion cell death in mice. This class of drugs has also shown similarly protective effects against Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases in animal models, and clinical trials are underway to test the medications against neurodegenerative diseases in humans.

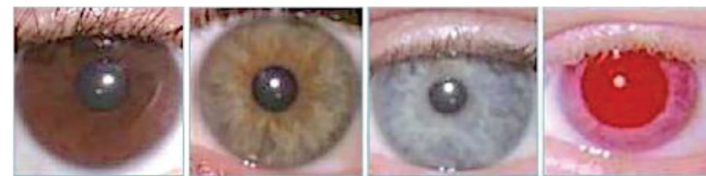
It is estimated that over 300,000 Australians have glaucoma, with 50% being unaware they have it and is also the second leading cause of blindness worldwide. People with diabetes are twice as likely to develop the eye condition.

"It was very encouraging to see that a popular diabetes medication could significantly reduce the risk of developing glaucoma, and our study suggests that these medications warrant further study in this patient population," says Qi N. Cui, MD, PhD, with Brian VanderBeek, MD, MPH, both assistant professors of Ophthalmology at Penn. ●

Explaining genetics of eye diseases using eye colour

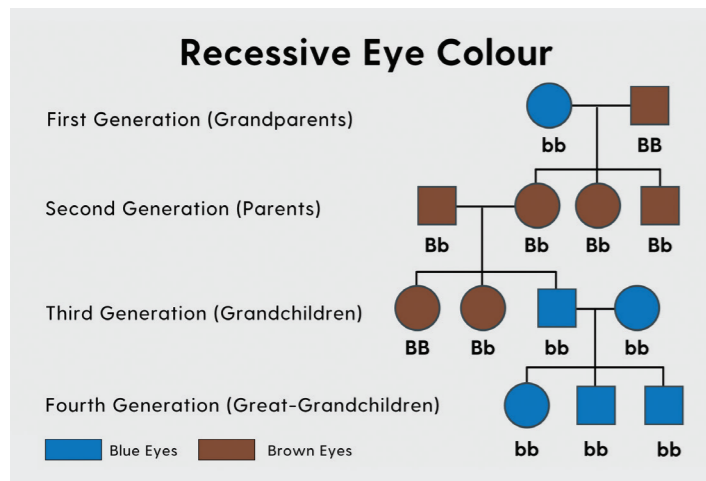
Written by Professor David A Mackey

Over the last 30 years, the number of papers published annually that pertain to glaucoma genetics has risen from around 20 per year to over 400 per year. This explosion of our understanding of genes involved in glaucoma has implications for people with glaucoma and their families. It is helpful to understand some of the important concepts in genetics to effectively engage with the health system for maximum benefit, particularly for early detection of glaucoma.



**Dominant
Brown**

**Recessive
Blue/Albino**



Squares are male and circles are female

Professor Mackey has been working in glaucoma genetics for 30 years and has contributed to many advances in genetic understanding.

To explain genetics in a more interesting and easily understood format, he has used the example of eye colour to explain the patterns of inheritance. In high school, many students are taught that brown eyes are dominant and blue eyes are recessive. This is mostly due to a gene called OCA2 where the two recessive versions (bb) produce blue eyes, while the two dominant versions (BB) produce brown eyes. The mixture of dominant and recessive genes (bB) also results in brown eyes.

This is a good simple example of Mendelian inheritance, and many families can plot this out to fit the dominant/recessive pattern. However, some families don't follow this simple pattern of eye colour inheritance. Other genes are also involved, and it is a more complex picture, usually with a combination of genes influencing the eye colour, which is more than just brown and blue, with green and hazel also present.

A similar situation exists with glaucoma. Some families have a very dominant genetic mutation running through the family and 50% of children are at risk. However, over 400 different genes can contribute to glaucoma and most families have more complicated inheritance patterns.

In an article published in the British journal Eye, Professor Mackey discussed the genetics of eye colour, with recent research findings. He included some interesting anecdotes and references to popular culture, such as the way eye colour played a role in the plot of the popular TV series Game of Thrones. ●

How to be your own advocate: building your health care support team

Written by Sapna Nand

Glaucoma is a lifelong condition; you need to ensure you're comfortable with everyone in your support network and feel confident about the decisions made regarding your eye health. It starts off with choosing the right eye care professionals for yourself, establishing trust in their expertise so that you understand and adhere to your ongoing treatment and management plans to save the health of your eyes and maintain your quality of lifestyle.

You may be a new glaucoma suspect seeking professional advice for the first time, or you may be a person who has had glaucoma for years but are now looking for a new ophthalmologist due to common reasons such as your current one retiring, or you may have relocated to a new state/territory and now need to find one close to your new home. The information below will aim to guide you through building your health care support team.

How to choose your ophthalmologist

Public versus Private: As glaucoma is a lifelong condition requiring ongoing follow up appointments, the cost associated with consultations, tests and treatment over the years can add up to large amounts. In Australia, Medicare does cover a significant amount in private eye clinics. In the public eye clinics, this cost can be fully covered.

Things to consider when looking into public eye care is the wait time involved in getting an initial appointment (which at times can be up to a year, depending on individual cases), and not being able to choose your specific ophthalmologist. If you are considering getting your glaucoma managed in the public hospital, a report on your behalf will need to be sent to your local eye clinic by your optometrist, GP, or current ophthalmologist.



Location: Being diagnosed with or being monitored for glaucoma requires ongoing appointments with your ophthalmologist. Appointment frequency can range from monthly to bi-annually. Each patient and their glaucoma are different, time spent at the eye clinic can be hours at a time depending on the tests you are doing on the day. Due to the eye drops used to prepare your eyes for examination, you may not always be able to drive back yourself and may need to rely on a friend or a family member for transport. Therefore, having your eye clinic located locally where possible will make the process a lot smoother.

Word of Mouth Referrals: This can include the health care professional referring you (your GP, optometrist, or your current ophthalmologist). Family or friends who have been under the care of the ophthalmologist.

The Glaucoma Australia Support Group on Facebook is a safe and supportive online group with over 1000 members who can offer valuable feedback and recommendations on ophthalmologists near you or suitable for your case.

Glaucoma Specialist versus General Ophthalmologist: All ophthalmologists can diagnose, treat and manage your glaucoma. A Glaucoma Specialist, however, has extra years of

training on glaucoma surgery and the more complicated glaucoma cases. If your General Ophthalmologist feels you will benefit from further intervention with a Glaucoma Specialist, they will refer you to them for further consultation.

Thinking of getting a second opinion?

It is ok to seek a second opinion. You may be wanting to explore a different treatment option your current ophthalmologist may not offer, or you may need the opinion of another expert for reassurance. Patients often consider a second opinion for various and sometimes personal reasons. It is important to have confidence in your treatment and management plans for the health of your eyes and your emotional well-being. A referral is needed to seek a second opinion from an ophthalmologist you have not seen before. This can be obtained from your current ophthalmologist, your optometrist, or your GP.

It always helps for your new ophthalmologist to have a copy of your past medical notes as future treatment and management plans can depend on how your glaucoma has progressed over the years or how you have responded to past treatments. For this reason, it is encouraged to have an open conversation with your current ophthalmologist about your reasons for seeking a second opinion. At times, your previous and new ophthalmologists can work together on your glaucoma management to ensure the best outcome for you. Your permission will be needed to release your medical notes from any previous eye clinic you have been to, please discuss this at the time of making your appointment.

Rapport and Trust: Taking into consideration the above points, finding the “best ophthalmologist” for yourself also depends on the rapport and trust you build during your appointments. It often helps to write out your questions before going into your appointments as it very easy to forget especially once you have new information to

process about your diagnosis and results. Staff at your eye clinic can often have busy and stressful days and can often run short of time to spend extra time with you to answer questions. We always encourage our patients to ask the questions as being well educated on your glaucoma will encourage adherence to ongoing treatment to save your sight.

Glaucoma Australia’s free support line 1800 500 880 is always available for all the extra questions and information you may have forgotten to ask during your appointments. We also have a helpful form you can use to help you prepare for your appointments.

Your healthcare support team

Apart from your ophthalmologist, it is very important to utilise other valuable health care professionals who can help you be in control of your glaucoma and your eye health.

Optometrist: Together with your ophthalmologist, your optometrist can help with ongoing monitoring and management of your glaucoma and general eye health. Apart from updating your glasses for optimal vision, your optometry clinic is well equipped with all the tests needed for glaucoma and for urgent appointments when your ophthalmologist is not available. Speak to your ophthalmologist about a shared care plan with your optometrist.

General Practitioner (GP): Your GP can prescribe you glaucoma eye drops for the times you may have forgotten to ask for one from your ophthalmologist. Please also consult your GP in case of any possible side effects from glaucoma medications.

Pharmacist: Your pharmacist can help you answer questions regarding possible side effects with glaucoma medications. They are also available to help choose safe and appropriate options for hay fever medications, sinus congestions and dry eye therapy for those who have glaucoma. ●

My Glaucoma Story

Eli’s story



‘So here we are again, in the race to stop vision loss. The eye redness, the light sensitivity, the rubbing, the pain induced cry, the poor sleeps, and hazy eyes. And the eye drops, oh the eye drops...

Yesterday we got the news that we are in for surgery two, and even though we knew, we hoped it wouldn’t be true. I let myself believe we were in the clear, even though I knew statistically, and, in my heart, we were nowhere near.

My heart aches. My heart hurts for you, and I know there is nothing I can do. I need to keep it together though; your strength is what I need. Please, help me follow your lead. It’s that smile in the morning that stops the tears from pouring.

The thing is, I know you will be fine but that doesn’t stop me from wishing this problem was just mine. I don’t know why I’m writing this; I think it’s more for me than you. As I know, no one is tougher and more resilient than you. I can’t stop crying and now this thing isn’t even rhyming. I don’t care, this whole thing isn’t fair.

Anyway, enough feeling sorry for myself, you’re waking from your nap, it’s time I wipe the tears

away and get ready for the day. I’ll make sure that today is full of play, full of cheeky giggles and lots of tickles. You’ll never know the sadness I feel inside, I won’t let it show.

Let us carry this burden, let us carry it for you. Let us shape your little world in a way that doesn’t focus on the upcoming surgery day. You deserve all the mango in the world, to watch the palm trees, play your piano and try all things new, like I don’t know, yummy marshmallow.

You’re awake now, I need to get out of my head, give you a big kiss and take you from your bed. To everyone out there praying over your babies, know you’re not alone, if you need to chat remember to reach out’. ●

- Kayla, Eli’s mum

If you wish to share your glaucoma journey, go to: www.glaucoma.org.au/share-your-story

OR email your story and a photo (optional) to glaucoma@glaucoma.org.au

Research

Putting the spotlight on childhood glaucoma



Written by Lachlan Knight

We see you and we hear you. Childhood glaucoma is a rare type of glaucoma that is diagnosed before someone turns 18 years old. Living with childhood glaucoma can be challenging, but there is little research out there that tells us about how the condition may impact on someone's life.

A team of researchers at the Australian and New Zealand Registry of Advanced Glaucoma (ANZRAG) at Flinders University, Adelaide, are dedicated to putting the spotlight on childhood glaucoma. They want to create better support systems and promote awareness of this rare condition.

So far, the ANZRAG team have interviewed almost 50 adults with childhood glaucoma and asked them about how the condition has or has not affected their lives in some way.

From these interviews, they have made a questionnaire to measure the impact of childhood glaucoma and need as many people as possible to complete it. It only takes 10 to 20 minutes.

If you have been diagnosed with glaucoma before the age of 18 years, the ANZRAG would love to hear from you.

To get in touch and receive an electronic or hard copy of the questionnaire, please contact Lachlan Knight via email or phone.

Email: Lachlan.WheelhouseKnight@flinders.edu.au

Phone: +61 8 8204 6986

**This questionnaire has been approved by the Women's and Children's Health Network Human Research Ethics Committee of Adelaide.*

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In Memoriam

We acknowledge with gratitude gifts, from family and friends, in loving memory of:

- Jessie Nokes
- Chan Suet Ying
- Mr Giuseppe Skrezerek
- Mrs Jennifer Dawn Best
- Mrs Rus Gaske

Bequests

- The Estate of the Late Anita McKenzie
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Giving HOPE

Leaving a Gift in your Will is a generous act of love that can make a sight-saving difference to future generations of Australians with glaucoma.

To receive a Bequest Information Pack please contact ceo@glaucoma.org.au or call 02 9411 7722.

How can we help?

Glaucoma Australia offers FREE education and support to people living with glaucoma.

If you or someone you care for has been diagnosed with glaucoma we recommend you join our community to access free resources, guidance and support.

Join our community online

www.glaucoma.org.au/get-support

Call our free support line

1800 500 880

Contact details

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Your Questions Answered

Q&A

with Sapna Nand

Sapna is an orthoptist educator with over 10 years' experience working with glaucoma patients. If you have any questions for Sapna, you can call our free toll support line 1800 500 880.

Q Can I (or should I) do physical activity?

A Keeping your weight down and being physically fit helps prevent health problems such as heart attacks and diabetes and is important for overall well-being. How pleasant to know, therefore, that these same measures also help protect you from glaucoma.

Q Can I continue to do weightlifting?

A If you do weightlift, try to breathe in as you lift the weights: don't hold your breath. This avoids strain, avoids increasing the pressure in the veins of your head and neck and thus avoids increasing the pressure in your eyes. For the same reason, select more repetitions with lighter weights rather than fewer lifts with heavier weights.

Q Is it safe to do yoga and Pilates if I have glaucoma?

A Well yes, and no. People with glaucoma may have increased eye pressure when doing head-down positions during yoga, such as downward dog. Advice will vary between individuals depending on your general eye health, how well controlled your glaucoma is, and your individual management and treatment plan.

If you're thinking of starting yoga

or Pilates, please consult your eye care health professional on how this may impact your glaucoma.

Q Is sex safe for people with glaucoma?

A From a glaucoma perspective, in a word yes - just don't hang head down for prolonged periods. Blood vessel health and thus visual health is also promoted by avoiding obesity and remaining as physically fit as possible.

A bonus is the added slight reduction in eye pressure exercise produces for some hours. The only exercises to be avoided are those in which your head is held below your waist - such a posture increases eye pressure. Yoga lovers take note.

Q Instead of conventional treatment, will any specific diet or complimentary medicine help my glaucoma?

A There is no scientific evidence that any diet has a helpful (or unhelpful) effect on glaucoma and available evidence does not show a benefit of herb, vitamin, and mineral supplements. Because optic nerve health depends in part on healthy blood vessels, food that helps to maintain blood vessel health is likely to promote visual health: reduced saturated fats and increased intake of vegetables and fruit are desirable. Your eye

health professional will recommend the best way to manage your glaucoma.

Q What is the maximum amount of caffeine I can consume daily?

A 340mg of caffeine is considered high in glaucoma management which is approximately 2-3 cups.

Drinking coffee or other caffeinated drinks can raise your eye pressure for about two hours. Caffeine is thought to increase the production of fluid (aqueous) within the eye. This short-term increase does not cause any problem for most people, but those with a strong family history or advanced glaucoma should consider reducing their caffeine intake if it exceeds the equivalent of 3-5 cups of coffee per day. De-caffeinated drinks may be considered as a safer option.

Q Will I lose my licence because I have glaucoma?

A This depends on the amount of vision loss from glaucoma. There are currently guidelines in place which specify the amount of central and peripheral vision a person must have in order to hold a drivers licence.

If you have any concerns about your suitability to drive then you should discuss this further with your eyecare practitioner.