

Driving and glaucoma





Glaucoma helpline

If you have questions about anything to do with glaucoma, contact our helpline on:

01233 64 81 70

Monday to Friday 9.30am to 5.00pm

If you call out of hours and leave a message, we'll return your call as soon as possible. Calls are charged at your standard network cost.

Email: helpline@glaucoma.uk

Visit our website glaucoma.uk

Help us keep our services free

We think it's important that everyone who needs help and information about glaucoma can get it for free. That's why we do not charge for our booklets or services – and why we're so grateful to everyone who gives up their time or donates money, no matter how much.

If you'd like to contribute towards the cost of this booklet or help fund our services, please visit our website glaucoma.uk/donate or call us on **01233 64 81 64**.

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Key points



Driving is important, but you must see enough to be safe.



If you have any glaucoma sight loss that you do not notice, it could lead to driving accidents.



You must tell the licensing agency (DVLA or DVA) if you have glaucoma either:

- in both eyes and drive a car or motorcycle;
- in one or both eyes and drive a bus, coach or lorry.

You must check if you need to tell your motor insurance company.



The licensing agency will ask you to have a visual field test to check that you're safe. If you're safe driving, they'll give you a licence for up to 5 years.



Most drivers with glaucoma keep their driving licence.



Protect your sight by using any prescribed eye drops every day and going to all your eye clinic appointments.

Introduction

We've produced this booklet to help you understand about driving and glaucoma.

If you have glaucoma in both eyes, you must tell the licensing agency straight away. They'll check that you see well enough to drive safely. If you do, they'll give you a licence. While you wait to hear from them, you can keep driving unless an eye specialist or other health professional tells you to stop.

What is glaucoma?

Glaucoma is a common group of eye diseases where the optic nerve has become damaged. Often, but not always, it's linked to high pressure inside the eye. The optic nerve connects the eye to the brain, so damage to it can lead to some sight loss.



For further information
and help see **page 25**

How might glaucoma affect what I see?

People who notice glaucoma sight loss typically describe blurry or misty patches in their vision.

However, most people cannot tell they have glaucoma. Glaucoma sight loss usually starts around the edges (in peripheral vision). Central vision is clear for much longer. You use central vision for detailed tasks like reading, watching TV and looking at faces. Your two eyes work together. If you have a gap in your vision in one eye, your other eye might make up for it. You might only notice misty or blurry patches when you close one eye. Even then, your brain might fill in the gaps, so what you see looks complete.

How might glaucoma affect driving?

If you have sight loss in both eyes and it overlaps, there's a gap where your brain is missing information about what's there. It fills in an image based on everything else you see. This could lead to accidents while you're driving.

Full vision



Moderate glaucoma



Advanced glaucoma



How glaucoma might affect vision when driving

While driving is important for your freedom and independence, you need to see enough to be safe on the road. As glaucoma happens slowly, it's important to have your eyes tested regularly to make sure you stay safe.

If an eye specialist finds and treats your glaucoma early, you are likely to keep enough sight to drive.



More than 9 in 10 drivers with glaucoma keep their driving licence (as of 2019).

Who do I need to tell about my glaucoma?

You might need to tell the licensing agency and your insurance company about your glaucoma. Whether you need to do this depends on the type of licence you have and if you have glaucoma in one or both eyes.

The licensing agency

The organisations that manage driving licences are:

- in England, Wales and Scotland, The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA);

- in Northern Ireland, The Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA).

In this booklet, we call both the DVLA and DVA “the licensing agency.”

Car or motorcycle (group 1) drivers

Tell the licensing agency if:

- you have glaucoma in both eyes;
- you have glaucoma in one eye and poor vision in the other eye due to another eye condition.

You can keep driving without telling the licensing agency if you have glaucoma in just one eye and good vision in the other. This is the case even if you have raised eye pressure without damage to your optic nerve (ocular hypertension) in the other eye.

Bus, coach or lorry (group 2) drivers

Tell the licensing agency if you have glaucoma in one eye or both.

Even if your eyesight seems to be unaffected, you must tell the licensing agency.



As a driver, it is your responsibility to inform the licensing agency of any medical condition which may affect your ability to drive.

You can be fined up to £1,000 if you fail to tell them. Failing to tell the licensing agency might invalidate your motor insurance. Medical professionals must also tell the licensing agency if they know you might not meet the required standards and you are still driving.

How do I tell the licensing agency?

England, Scotland or Wales

Car and motorcycle (group 1) drivers

- Report your glaucoma online, or download and print a form, at www.gov.uk/eye-conditions-and-driving
- Phone the DVLA to ask for a paper copy of the V1 form.

Bus, coach or lorry (group 2) drivers

- Download and print a V1V form at www.gov.uk/eye-conditions-and-driving/bus-coach-lorry
- Phone the DVLA to ask for a paper copy of the V1V form.

Northern Ireland

Phone, email or send a letter to the DVA to ask for a form. Tell them what type of licence you hold and that you need to report glaucoma, so that they send you the right form.

There are different forms for reporting other medical conditions and for different licence types. Make sure that you ask for and fill in the right form.

Motor insurance company

Your motor insurance policy tells you what medical conditions you need to report; glaucoma may be one. If in any doubt, contact your insurance company. If you fail to tell them about one of these conditions, your insurance might be invalid.

Your insurance company should provide cover and keep your premium the same as long as:

- you tell the licensing agency about your glaucoma;
- the licensing agency allows you to keep driving;
- you tell the insurance company about any medical conditions that the policy says you must.

What happens when I tell the licensing agency?

When you tell the licensing agency about your glaucoma, they'll want to find out more about your eyesight. They'll write to you, inviting you to book a sight test at a high street optician. The licensing agency pays for this test, so it's free to you.

- In England, Scotland or Wales, they'll usually give you a choice of four local branches of Specsavers.

- In Northern Ireland, you can choose any high street optician that offers the test.

The licensing agency might also write to your eye specialist or GP to ask for information.

They'll use your test results and other information to check you meet their visual standards and are safe to drive.

What are the visual standards?

All drivers must meet visual standards set by the licensing agency. These include the following:

- How well you can see detail at a distance. This is known as visual acuity.
- How wide an area you can see things in. This is known as your visual field. It checks how well you can see things:
 - straight ahead (in your central vision);
 - to the sides and up and down (in your peripheral vision).

Car or motorcycle drivers

Visual acuity

- You can read a car number plate 20 metres (about 65

feet) away.

- You can see at 6 metres (about 20 feet) what someone with 'normal' sight can see at 12 metres (about 40 feet). This is known as having visual acuity of at least 6/12.

Visual field

You have good vision to the left, right, up and down. The licensing agency's standards for visual field are complex. If you have any significant visual field loss in the same place in both eyes, you might not meet the standards.

Bus, coach or lorry drivers

You need to meet higher standards. To find out more about driving a bus, coach or lorry if you have glaucoma, contact the licensing agency.



What tests will I have?

An eye specialist called an optometrist, or their assistant, will test your visual acuity and visual field.

You do the tests with both eyes open and working together.

If you wear glasses or contact lenses when driving, you should wear them for the tests.

Visual acuity test

The optometrist or their assistant will ask you to read letters from a chart, card or screen.

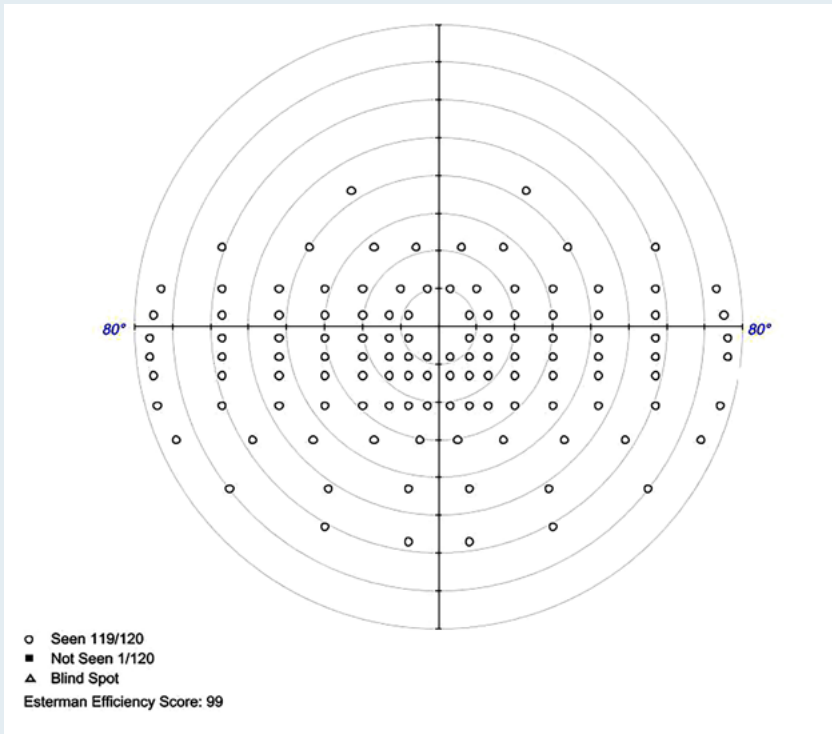


An example of a chart used in a visual acuity test (Snellen chart)

Visual field test

The optometrist or their assistant will ask you to:

- sit at a visual field test machine;
- look at a fixed point;
- press a button every time you see a light.



An example of results from a visual field test for driving (Esterman). This tests both eyes working together.

The test you are most likely to do is an Esterman test. It's different to the visual field test done at a routine eye test or eye clinic appointment. Most people find it easier.

- It measures a wider area of your visual field.
- It tests both eyes working together.
- The lights stay the same brightness.

If you wear glasses and the frames get in the way, you may be able to repeat the test without them.

Tell the optometrist or their assistant if you find the test hard. For example:

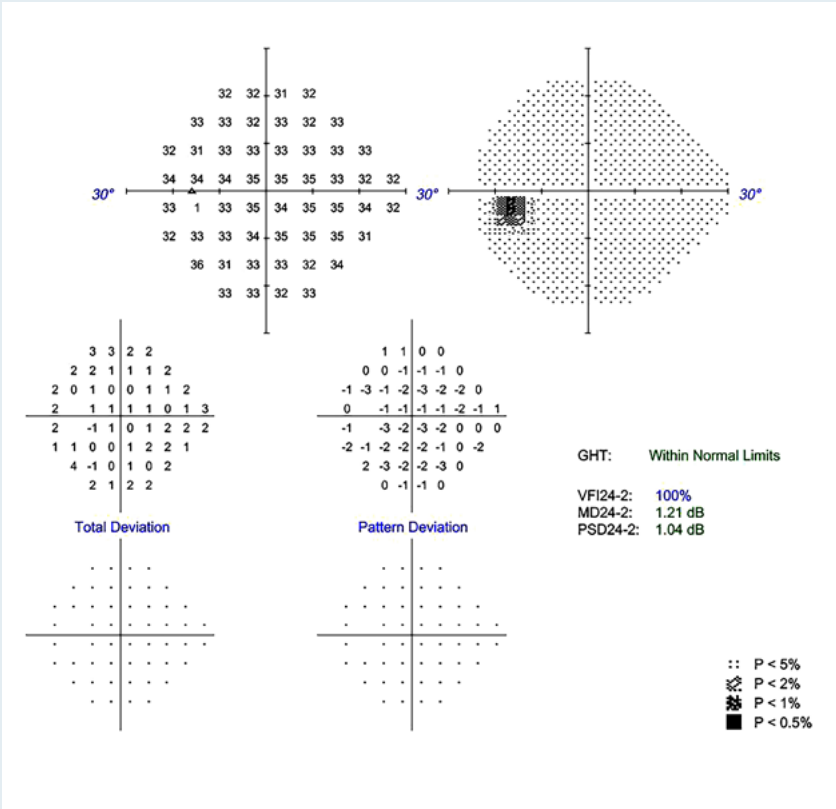
- you're distracted;
- you keep pressing the button when there's no light;
- you do not understand what you are supposed to do.

You can do the visual field test up to three times at your appointment.

If you find the test hard or you're distracted, your reactions might be inconsistent. For example, when a light is in the same place, you might sometimes press the button and sometimes not. The machine checks for this and will tell the optometrist that you might be struggling.

If you found the test hard to do, the licensing agency will see this when they get your results. They might invite you to do a different type of test, called a Goldmann test, at a high street optician or eye clinic.

The optometrist or their assistant should be able to give you a copy of the test results. If they cannot, you can ask the licensing agency for a copy.



An example of results from a visual field test at the eye clinic. This tests one eye at a time and is unsuitable for driving.

What happens after the sight tests?

The optometrist sends the results to the licensing agency. The licensing agency decides whether you've met the standards, and they'll write to tell you.

If you meet the standards, the licensing agency will give you a licence for one, two, three or five years. The time depends on your age and your test results. For example, if you only just met the standards, they might give you a driving licence for just one year.

What happens when my licence expires?

You will need to apply to renew your licence. The licensing agency will send you a reminder 90 days before your licence expires. If you do not get this reminder, you should contact them.



It is your responsibility to make sure that you apply to renew your license.

Usually, the licensing agency will ask you to go for another sight test. Sometimes they might just ask you to tell them whether your vision has changed. They might also contact your eye specialist or GP for information.

If you still meet the visual standards, the licensing agency will give you another licence.

Can I drive while I'm waiting to hear?

You may have to wait months to get the licensing agency's decision. While you're waiting to hear, you can drive as long as:

- the licensing agency has got your application;
- you sent the licensing agency your application within the last 12 months;
- you feel you are safe to drive;
- you have not been told by an eye specialist or other healthcare professional to stop driving.

If your licence expires while you wait:

- in the UK you can keep driving;
- abroad you should check with the country you're driving in.

Can I appeal?



If the licensing agency says you do not meet the visual standards and you must stop driving, you can appeal. The letter from the licensing agency will tell you how to do this.

There are two types of appeal:

1. informal appeals to the licensing agency;
2. formal appeals to a court.

Informal appeals

An informal appeal is when you ask the licensing agency to look again at their decision. You need to prove that your vision meets the visual standards. There are two main ways

you can do this.

- Get a second opinion at a high street optician. You'll have to take and pay for another sight test.
- Send the licensing agency new medical evidence, such as other test results or hospital letters.

When you send new information to the licensing agency, always include your reference number. You'll find this on letters from them.

If the new information suggests you might meet the visual standard, the licensing agency will send you for another test.



Between 2010 and 2019, 7 in 10 informal appeals were successful.

Formal appeals

After an informal appeal, if you still think the decision is wrong, talk to your eye specialist about a formal appeal:

- in England, Wales or Northern Ireland to the magistrates' court;
- in Scotland to the sheriff court.

You must start your formal appeal

- in England and Wales within 6 months;

- in Northern Ireland within 3 months;
- in Scotland within 3 weeks.



Only make a formal appeal if your eye specialist feels you have a strong case. If you lose the appeal, you'll have to bear the costs.

What if I choose to stop driving?

You should stop driving if:

- you feel unsafe driving;
- your vision has changed, and you no longer see enough to drive safely;
- a healthcare professional tells you that you should stop.

You should either

- still tell the licensing agency about your glaucoma and go for a sight test or
- give up your license.

The licensing agency calls giving up your licence voluntary

surrender. If you choose to give up your license, here's what you need to do.

England, Scotland or Wales

- Fill in a 'Declaration of voluntary surrender' form. Download this from www.gov.uk/government/publications/declaration-of-voluntary-surrender
- Phone the DVLA to ask for a paper copy. Send it with your licence to the DVLA.

Northern Ireland

Send both parts of your licence and a covering letter to the DVA. In your letter, tell them that you want to surrender your licence because of glaucoma.



If you give up your licence and later want to drive again, you'll have to reapply for a new licence. You'll have to have another sight test, but you will not need to redo your driving test.

Contacting the licensing agency



Always give your reference number. You'll find this on any letter from the licensing agency.

DVLA in England, Scotland and Wales

General enquiries

- Email glaucomaqueries@dvla.gov.uk
- Visit www.gov.uk/glaucoma-and-driving
- Write to Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, Drivers Customer Services, Correspondence Team, DVLA, Swansea, SA6 7JL

- Phone about a car and motorcycle licence on **0300 790 68 06**
- Phone about a bus, coach or lorry licence on **0300 79 06 807**

If possible, contact the DVLA online. You're likely to get a quicker response than by post or phone.

Appeals

Write to DM Business Support, D7, DVLA, SA99 1ZZ

DVA in Northern Ireland

General enquiries

- Email **dva@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk**
- Visit **www.nidirect.gov.uk/information-and-services/driver-licensing/medical-conditions-and-driving**
- Write to Driver and Vehicle Agency, County Hall, Castlerock Road, Waterside, Coleraine, BT51 3HS
- Phone **0300 200 78 61**

Appeals

Write to Medical Section, Driver Licensing Division, Castlerock Road, Waterside, Coleraine, BT51 3TB

Further help and information from Glaucoma UK

As well as our information booklets, helpline and website, there are lots of other ways we can help you to live well with your glaucoma.

- A buddy scheme: if you're worried about treatment or surgery, you can speak to someone who has first-hand experience. Contact our helpline for more information.
- Glaucoma support groups: find out more about glaucoma, share information, and ask questions. Visit our website or call our helpline to see if there is one near you. We also run digital glaucoma support groups online.
- Health Unlocked: join our forum and talk to other people with glaucoma. Visit healthunlocked.com/glaucoma-uk

Other free advice booklets

We have other free information booklets to order or download.

Check our website or call our helpline for a full list of booklets currently available.

About Glaucoma UK



Campaigning & Awareness

Fewer people go blind



Advice & Support

People with glaucoma live well and stay well



Research

Better diagnosis, care and treatment

Glaucoma UK (formerly the International Glaucoma Association) is a registered UK charity.

Glaucoma UK is the charity for people with glaucoma. We campaign to raise awareness so glaucoma is detected early and can be treated, we support people to live well with the disease and we fund sight-saving research. Our aim is to end preventable glaucoma sight loss.

Join Glaucoma UK

Become a member of Glaucoma UK and join the fight against glaucoma! As a member you will receive a range of benefits including our quarterly membership magazine, full of news and information about glaucoma. Find out more at www.glaucoma.uk/membership or phone **01233 64 81 64**.

Notes

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Disclaimer

While every step has been taken to compile accurate information and to keep it up to date, we cannot guarantee its correctness and completeness. A list of sources used in writing this booklet is available on request.

Glaucoma UK and the author cannot take responsibility if you rely solely on the information in this booklet. The information provided is designed as an addition to, and not a substitute for, professional advice from a qualified doctor or other healthcare professional, which will be tailored to a patient's individual circumstances.

The information in this booklet was correct at the time of writing (May 2023).

With thanks to our contributors and reviewers:

- DVLA
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Glaucoma UK is the operating name of the International Glaucoma Association. Charity registered in England and Wales No. 274681 and Scotland No. SC041550