

Patient information

Hydroxychloroquine Screening

You have been invited to attend a Hydroxychloroquine Screening appointment at the Eye Treatment centre at the West Suffolk Hospital.

What is hydroxychloroquine?

Hydroxychloroquine is a medication used to treat several conditions including rheumatoid arthritis, systemic lupus erythematosus, some skin conditions (especially photosensitive ones) and others that involve inflammation. It was previously used in the treatment and prevention of malaria although it is no longer effective in this use as the malaria parasite has developed resistance to hydroxychloroquine and chloroquine.

Your doctor has prescribed hydroxychloroquine to help manage your condition. It is a very safe and effective drug but, like all medicines, it can cause side effects.

Hydroxychloroquine retinopathy

It is known that some people who take hydroxychloroquine for more than five years and/or in high doses are at increased risk of damage to their retina, the light sensitive layer of cells at the back of the eye. This is known as retinal toxicity or retinopathy.

Overall, around seven patients out of every 100 taking hydroxychloroquine for more than five years may develop retinopathy that can be detected with specialised tests. The risk is much higher in patients who have been taking the drug for 20 years or more. In these patients between 20 and 50 out of 100 will develop retinopathy.

Severe retinopathy, especially in the central area called the macula, causes significant, irreversible sight loss. For this reason the NHS now offers patients taking hydroxychloroquine regular eye health checks to screen them for signs of retinopathy.

Screening for hydroxychloroquine retinopathy

The aim of screening is not to prevent retinopathy but to detect the earliest definitive signs of it before a patient notices any symptoms, because of this you have been invited to take part in the screening programme at the Eye Treatment centre.

Where will the screening take place?

Your appointment will take place in the Eye Treatment Centre located on the first floor of the day surgery unit.

The screening tests

There are several tests used to screen your eyes for signs of retinopathy. They all involve different types of imaging of the retina and are non-invasive (they do not cause pain and do not risk damaging the eye in any way). At your screening appointment you will have three tests: a visual field test, fundus photography and an OCT scan of the back of your eye.

What will happen at my appointment?

At this appointment, you will have a visual field test and photographs and scans taken of the back wall of your eye called the retina. If your eyes are healthy, it is likely you will be screened again in the future; this will be decided by the department that referred you to the Eye Clinic. Monitoring your eyes in this way helps to detect very early signs of damage to the retina.

What is a visual field test?

In this test, one eye is tested at a time while the other is temporarily covered with a patch. You will be seated in front of a machine called a perimeter and asked to look through a viewfinder at a fixed spot inside the machine. A computer randomly flashes points of light and when you see a light, you press a button. It is important to keep looking straight ahead – don't move your eyes to look for the light, wait until it appears in your side vision. It is normal for some of the lights to be difficult to see and a delay in seeing a light does not necessarily mean your field of vision is damaged.

What is a fundus photograph and OCT scan?

A fundus photograph is a photograph of the surface of your retina. You will have a special photograph that detects abnormal levels of a substance called lipofuscin in the retina, which may be an early sign of disease. This test is called fundus autofluorescence (FAF) imaging. The second is a scan that provides a cross-sectional image of the various layers of your retina. This is called an Optical Coherence Tomography (OCT) scan.

In all these tests you will be seated in front of a large, camera-like machine with a chin rest. You may have several photographs and scans done to obtain good images of a large part of your retina. Before the tests you will be given eye drops that temporarily widen (dilate) your pupils. This is to allow more light into the eye to give a better view of your retina.

Please note: the drops to dilate your pupil will make your vision blurry for up to six hours. You will not be able to drive until the effects of the drops have worn off. So please ensure that you do not drive to your appointment and arrange suitable transport home.

Who will review my results?

All the tests will be assessed by an Ophthalmologist (hospital eye doctor) after you have left the clinic. A report will be sent to you, your GP and/or the hospital doctor who referred you for screening.

What to do if you are worried about your vision

If, at any time, you notice a change in your vision you should make an appointment to see an optometrist at your local opticians as soon as possible. Please ensure you tell the optometrist that you are taking hydroxychloroquine.

If you are already on the screening programme for hydroxychloroquine retinopathy, and your last screening tests were normal, it is very unlikely that your symptoms are due to hydroxychloroquine retinopathy. The next screening visit does not need to happen sooner than planned. However, the optometrist will check your eyes for other conditions, which might need further review or treatment.

Progression of retinopathy

Unfortunately, in some people with more advanced retinopathy, stopping hydroxychloroquine treatment does not prevent the disease from getting worse. At the moment there is no treatment for hydroxychloroquine toxicity. If the disease does progress a person may experience significant loss of vision over time. You will be offered support and information to help you deal with any sight loss.

If your vision does deteriorate, you will be referred to the Eye Treatment centre Eye Clinic Liaison officer (ECLO) who will be able to help you access support.

It is very important that you attend your screening appointments. If you cannot attend on the appointment given, then please contact the Eye Treatment centre to make an alternative appointment as soon as possible.

If you would like to decline screening for Hydroxychloroquine Screening please notify us as soon as possible so your appointment can be offered to another patient.

Eye Treatment Centre

Telephone 01284 713815 / 01284 712636

Monday - Thursday 9.00am – 5.00pm

Friday 9.00am – 1.00pm

If you would like any information regarding access to the West Suffolk Hospital and its facilities please visit the website for AccessAble (the new name for DisabledGo)

<https://www.accessable.co.uk/organisations/west-suffolk-nhs-foundation-trust>



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