

Build-up of protein or calcium on your optic nerve (optic nerve head drusen)

Ophthalmology Department

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Information for Patients

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What is the optic nerve?

The optic nerve is a collection of over 1 million nerve cells. These cells carry visual signals from the eye to the brain. The head of the optic nerve as it enters the back of the eye (retina) is also called the optic disc.

What are optic nerve head drusen?

Optic nerve drusen are deposits of protein or calcium found in the optic nerve.

- They can be found on the surface of the nerve head or buried beneath the surface.
- They are found in around 1 to 2% of the population.
- They usually appear in the nerves of both eyes but sometimes can be present in just 1 eye.

Drusen can cause the optic nerve head to look lumpy or raised. This is why the optician has referred you to the hospital for further checks.

What causes the optic nerve head drusen?

The exact cause is not known. 1 theory is that, it maybe abnormal movement of material along the nerve.

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Drusen can be inherited but can also show up when no other family member is affected. Drusen are thought to be present from birth (congenital) but not visible as they are deeply buried. As you get older, drusen becomes hardened. They rise to the surface where they can be seen. This can happen at any age in childhood up to adulthood. This may be why the optician has said, that the optic nerve head looks different to checks that were done before and has sent you for further checks in the hospital's eye service.

What is the effect on vision?

Normally drusen do not cause any symptoms. They are usually found on normal eye checks at the opticians. Very rarely drusen may affect the field of vision. This can be looked into over time with a visual field test by the local optician. More about visual field test can be found here: [Having a visual field test](#)

Is there any treatment for optic nerve head drusen?

There is no effective treatment for optic nerve head drusen. Since drusen rarely causes visual symptoms it does not need any treatment. Regular eye checks at the local optician are recommended to monitor vision.

Contact details

Neuro-ophthalmology Team, Leicester Royal Infirmary

Monday to Friday, 8am to 5pm - Tel: 0116 2585277

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Previous reference:

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