Glaucoma drainage device (tube) surgery

A glaucoma drainage device or 'tube' consists of a small tube that inserts into the front of the eye that connects to a plate that sits outside the eyeball. The purpose of a glaucoma tube is to lower the pressure in the eye. It will not improve vision and will not reverse damage caused by glaucoma.

Your doctor will only recommend tube insertion if they think that without it, your eye is likely to go permanently blind from glaucoma.

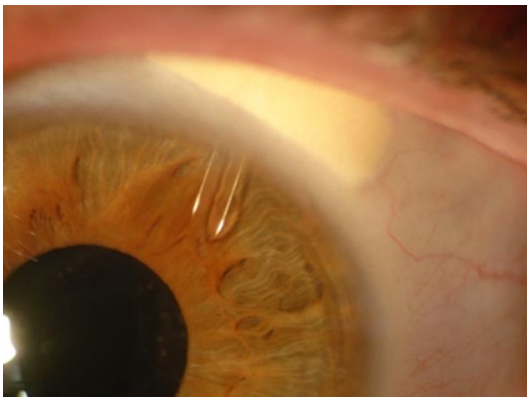
The chance of a tube lowering the eye pressure significantly is about 80%. So it is not guaranteed to work, and indeed in 1 in 5 people it will not make any difference. The chance of it working is not related to the skill of the surgeon but rather how your eye heals. If your eye forms too much scar tissue then the tube may not work. Also the operation may work initially but may fade with time.

There are risks involved with the operation:

1 in 5 chance of the operation not lowering the pressure as intended
1 in 10 chance of having to go back to the operating room for an adjustment
1 in 10 chance of some loss of central vision
1 in 20 chance of double vision
1 in 20 chance of damage to the cornea (clear window at the front of the eye) requiring a corneal transplant
1 in 100 chance of infection

The decision for your doctor to recommend glaucoma surgery is not taken lightly. The reason it is recommended is that your doctor thinks the chances of the eye going blind is greater if you don't have surgery. It is usually recommended after less risky methods have failed to lower the pressure enough. You may choose not to have surgery and let the eye die of natural causes, but it must be remembered that once the vision is lost the eye will be permanently blind.

After the tube is put in place it must heal for 6-8 weeks before it is made to work by using laser in the clinic. After that the pressure can be quite variable. It is not until 6 months after the surgery that it will be clear if the operation has worked or not. If it does not work then there is the option of another tube, or destructive laser treatment which carries the risk of the pressure going too low.



Tube in eye

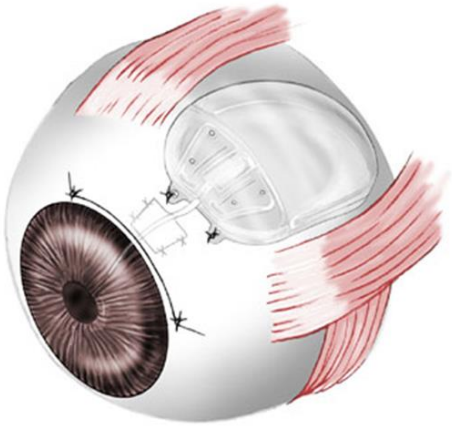


Plate on eye

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