Detached and Torn Retinas

The retina is a nerve layer at the back of your eye that senses light and sends images to your brain. A retinal detachment occurs when the retina is pulled away from its normal position. As a result, your vision becomes blurred (see photo below), just as a photo would be blurry if the film were loose inside your camera.

If you develop any of the early symptoms of detachment listed below, please contact your eye care provider right away:

- **Flashing lights**
- **New floaters**
- **A shadow in the periphery of your field of vision**
- **A gray curtain moving across your field of vision**

An untreated retinal detachment usually results in permanent severe vision loss or blindness. Several treatment options are available and almost all of them require surgery to return the retina to its proper position. The decision about which type of surgery and anesthesia (local or general) to use depends upon the characteristics of your detachment. An ophthalmologist who is a retina specialist will locate the retinal tears and use laser surgery or cryotherapy to seal the tears and use one of the following treatments to help prevent the retina tear and/or detachment from recurring.

**Scleral Buckle:** This is performed in an operating room and involves placing a flexible band around the eye to counteract the force pulling the retina out of place. The doctor often drains the fluid under the detached retina, allowing the retina to settle back into its normal position against the back wall of the eye.

**Pneumatic Retinopexy:** Sometimes this procedure can be done in the outpatient office. A gas bubble is injected into the vitreous space inside the eye and the bubble pushes the retinal tear against the back wall of the eye. Your doctor will ask you to maintain a certain head position for several days. The gas bubble will gradually disappear.

**Vitrectomy:** The vitreous gel, which is pulling on the retina, is removed from the eye and usually replaced with a gas bubble. Your body’s own fluids will gradually replace the gas bubble and this procedure is sometimes combined with a sclera buckle. You’ll need to wear an eye patch for a short time and flashing lights and floaters may continue for a while after surgery.

Most retinal detachment surgery is successful, although a second operation is sometimes needed. If the retina cannot be reattached, the eye will continue to lose sight and ultimately become blind. Your vision may take many months to improve and, in some cases, may never return fully.

Source: EyeCare America, A Foundation of the American Academy of Ophthalmology
Establish a Baseline of Eye Health

The American Academy of Ophthalmology now recommends that adults with no signs or risk factors for eye disease get a baseline eye disease screening at age 40 - the time when early signs of disease and changes in vision may start to occur. Based on the results of the initial screening, your eye care provider will prescribe the necessary intervals for follow-up exams.

For individuals at any age with symptoms of or at risk for eye disease, such as those with a family history of eye disease, diabetes or high blood pressure, the Academy recommends that individuals see their eye care provider to determine how frequently their eyes should be examined.

The new recommendation does not replace regular visits to the ophthalmologist to treat ongoing disease or injuries, or for vision examinations for eye glasses or contact lenses. A baseline evaluation is important because it may detect eye diseases common in adults aged 40 and older. It creates the opportunity for early treatment and preservation of vision.

Source: American Academy of Ophthalmology

Interesting Facts

Did you know that . . .

- Each of our eyelashes has a life span of approximately 5 months
- An ostrich’s eye is only 2 inches across but it weighs more than its brain
- Of all the muscles in our body, the eye muscles are the most active
- Mosquitoes can see into the infrared range, so humans appear to light up to them. To a mosquito at night, you look like a neon sign at the local diner!
- Our eyes utilize 65% of all the pathways to the brain
- An early version of the magnifying glass, a “reading stone”, was developed in 1000 A.D.

What’s happening in Eye Care Research?

Clinical trials that are currently underway at the Penn State Hershey Eye Center are listed on the website of the Clinical Trials Office along with contact information for each study at:

http://www.pennstatehershey.org/web/eyecenter/research/clinicaltrials

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