

Retinal Detachment

The retina lines the inside back wall of the eye. It is a thin tissue made up of layers of cells. The retina contains the light-sensitive cells that tell the brain what you are looking at. It is lined on its front surface by the vitreous. This is a clear gel made largely of water and collagen fibers. It fills the center of the eye and lies between the retina and the lens.

A detached retina starts when the vitreous comes away from the retina. This may lead to a tear of the retina. Fluid can pass through the hole or tear and lift the retina away from the back wall of the eye. When the retina pulls away or detaches from the wall of the eye, vision is lost or impaired.

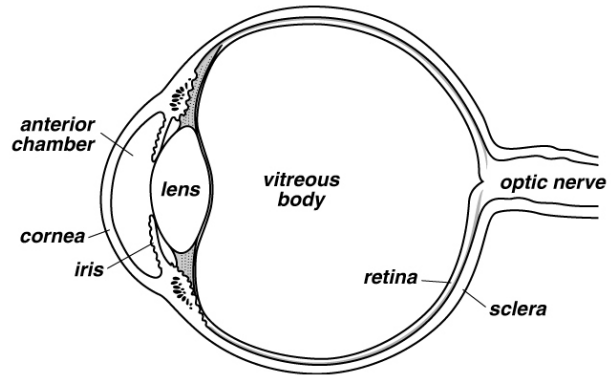
Who is affected?

While a detached retina can happen at any age, it most often occurs in people over the age of 50. It is the result of changes in our eyes as we age. It is more common in eyes that have had cataract surgery and in very nearsighted eyes. It is seldom caused by eye trauma.

What are the warning signs?

- Light “flashes” and blurred vision
- The presence of a “veil” or shadow over part of the field of vision
- Large “floaters” or spots that travel across the field of vision. These could mean that the retina is torn, or the vitreous fibers are clumped.

You should report any of these warning signs to the eye doctor right away. Prompt treatment may be needed to maintain your sight.



How is it treated?

Small holes and tears and very small detached retinas are often treated with laser in the doctor’s office. In **laser photocoagulation**, pinpoints of laser light are used to create tiny burns around the hole to “weld” the retina back to the wall of the eye. **Cryopexy** is much the same, but instead of using heat, it freezes the area around the hole.

Surgical repair: If a great deal of fluid has flowed through the tear, a large detachment may occur, and surgery may be needed. To repair the retinal detachment, the hole or tear must be sealed. A bubble of gas may be injected into the eye to press the detached retina against the wall of the eye. Treatment includes the use of laser or freezing treatment to seal around the hole.

Alternatively, a band of silicone may be placed around the eye. This is to indent the eye’s outer wall to help bring the retina in contact with the back wall. The fluid beneath the retina may need to be drained. In many cases, the vitreous must be removed and a gas bubble used to hold the retina in place against the back wall of the eye.

Ninety percent of detached retinas can be repaired. This does not mean vision will be as it was before. There may be some loss in the quality of vision. If treated early, chances are greater that your vision will be restored. If the retina cannot be reattached, vision will continue to decrease and finally will be lost in the eye.

Phone Numbers

University Station Eye Clinic, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday
(608) 263-7171

When the clinic is closed, your call will be forwarded to the hospital paging operator. Ask for the “Eye Resident on Call”. Give the operator your name and phone number with area code. The doctor will call you back.

If you live out of the area, call **1-800-323-8942** and ask to be transferred to the above number.

Please call if you have any questions or concerns.

If you are a patient receiving care at UnityPoint – Meriter, Swedish American or a health system outside of UW Health, please use the phone numbers provided in your discharge instructions for any questions or concerns.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 6/2019 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#5689