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Epiretinal Membrane Information

What is an epiretinal membrane

The eye is like a camera with a lens in the front and film in the back of the eye. The retina is the light sensitive film at the back of the eye. An epiretinal membrane is a condition where a thin layer of scar tissue forms on the surface of the retina. When this membrane grows over an area called macula (an important area responsible for our sharp central vision) on the retina, it causes wrinkling and crumples up the macula leading to distorted and/or blurred vision.

What causes epiretinal membrane

In the majority of patients, epiretinal membrane develops due to the normal aging changes inside the eye. In some cases, it can be related to other conditions like diabetes, blockage of retinal blood vessels, inflammation or previous retinal surgery. Epiretinal membrane affects about 8% of people in later years. Epiretinal membrane is also called as Cellophane maculopathy or Macular pucker.

What are the symptoms

In many patients, epiretinal membrane is an incidental diagnosis made during routine eye examination and the vision may not be affected. However, epiretinal membrane can warp and wrinkle the retina which makes your vision to distort and blur, straight line may appear wavy and images may appear larger or smaller than real. These symptoms become obvious when good eye is covered.

Though epiretinal membrane can be diagnosed by clinical examination, it is necessary to do OCT scan of retina, to get intricate details of epiretinal membrane to advice about the surgical outcome. Mr Viswanathan has access to the state-of-the-art retinal scanner to investigate the epiretinal membrane.

What is the treatment for epiretinal membrane

In many patients, epiretinal membrane is an incidental diagnosis made during your routine eye examination and your vision may not be affected. These epiretinal membranes tend not to progress and do not affect your vision, so treatment may not be necessary. However, if they do get worse and if you have significant distortion and/or blurring of your vision which begins to affect your quality of life then the only way to treat it is to remove the membrane surgically to reduce visual distortion.

Epiretinal membrane removal surgery – Sutureless Surgery

The epiretinal membrane is removed by a procedure called vitrectomy and epiretinal membrane peel. This involves a surgical procedure whereby the vitreous jelly is removed (Vitreotomy) from inside the eye to gain access to the membrane for it to be peeled away from the central part of the retina. The vitrectomy surgery is performed through three key-holes in the eye which does not require suturing.

In some cases, special gas bubble is left inside the eye which will dissolve on its own after few weeks. If gas is used, you will be asked to position your head in a certain way for some part of the day for up to 7 days and you must not fly or go high altitude until gas bubble disappears. The operation can be performed under local or general anaesthesia as a day case procedure, which usually takes about an hour. If there is a cataract along with epiretinal membrane, then cataract is also removed at the same time a single procedure during epiretinal membrane surgery.

How successful is the surgery

Epiretinal membrane peel surgery is successful in vast majority of patients, as 80 to 90 % of patients undergoing this surgery notice improved vision with a decrease in visual distortion. Much of the visual improvements occurs in the first few weeks and this can take up to 6 months. For majority of patients vision will not revert to normal and rarely vision can be worse after surgery. Epiretinal membrane can reappear after few years in only about 10% of patients following successful first surgery and it may or may not require further treatment

What are the risks of epiretinal membrane surgery

As with any procedure, there are risks involved and you should discuss this with your surgeon before you give consent for surgery.

Common complications to be aware of include:

Cataract (clouding of the natural lens of the eye, sometimes cataract is also removed at the same time as the epiretinal membrane removal)

Retinal detachment in 1 – 2%,

Recurrence of membrane in 1 – 2%,

Ending up with worse vision after surgery in about 2 %

Cystoid macular oedema – Swelling of central retina in about 10%

Bleeding – very rare but if severe it can result in blindness

Infection – very rare about 1 in 1000, but can lead to blindness

Persistently raised eye pressure about 1 %

Sympathetic endophthalmitis - a very rare condition in which surgery in one eye triggers inflammation and sight problems in the other (1:10,000)

What to expect after the operation

Epiretinal membrane surgery is a major operation and it is normal to experience some discomfort in the eye following surgery. In some cases, special gas bubble is left inside the eye which will dissolve on its own after few weeks. If gas is used, you may be asked to position your head in a certain way for some part of the day for up to 7 days. The white of the eye may appear red with swelling to the eyelid. You may have some watering of the eye and a gritty sensation in the eye which slowly disappears in few days. You will be given eye drops to use for few weeks. You can shower or bath but avoid getting water directly into the eye, abstain from unhygienic environments, strenuous physical work and anything that puts the eye at risk of injury.

When will be the follow up appointment

You will be reviewed usually after one week and again after 4 weeks. Your vision in that eye will be blurred for a few weeks after the operation but it should improve slowly over time and this can take up to six months. Mr Viswanathan will discuss your final expected visual outcome of your surgery. If you have any concerns, please discuss this with your surgeon.

How much time will I need off work

You will need rest from work for about two weeks. We advise against driving until gas bubble disappears for the first few weeks while the vision improves. The duration of time off work depends on the kind of work you do. However, any work-related or driving related concerns should be discussed with your surgeon.

Where can I find further information

Understanding epiretinal membrane surgery can be complicated. The information given above will not cover all the concerns you may have about this procedure. Further information can be found at the following websites:

<https://www.rnib.org.uk/eye-health/eye-conditions/epiretinal-membrane>

Scientific Evidence

The information mentioned here is based on a variety of sources, including latest published research and the Britain & Eire Association of Vitreoretinal Surgeons.

Disclaimer

It is impossible to diagnose and treat patients without complete eye examination by an ophthalmologist. I hope the above information will be of help before and after a consultation which this information supplements and does not replace. This information must not be used as a substitute for professional medical care by a qualified doctor or other health care professional.

If you have any concerns about your condition or treatment, please ask your surgeon Mr Viswanathan. We are not responsible or liable, directly or indirectly, for ANY form of damages whatsoever resulting from the use (or misuse) of information contained in this page or found on web pages linked to from this page.

<https://viswa.uk/epiretinal-membrane>

