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*Information produced by the College of
Optometrists in conjunction with the Association of
Optometrists*



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Detached Retina & Macular Degeneration

C4 Sightcare
OPTOMETRISTS

Detached retina

Usually the retina is attached to the inner surface of the eye. If there is a tear or hole in the retina then fluid can get underneath. This weakens the attachment so that the retina becomes detached - rather like wallpaper peeling off a damp wall. When this happens the retina cannot compose a clear picture from the incoming rays and your vision becomes blurred and dim.

Who is more likely to suffer?

Detachment of the retina happens more to middle aged, short sighted people. It is quite uncommon however and only about one person in ten thousand is affected. Very rarely, younger people can have a weakness of the retina, or it can be detached as a result of a blow to the head.

What are the symptoms?

The most common symptom is a shadow spreading across the vision of one eye. One may also experience bright flashes of light and/or showers of dark spots called floaters. These symptoms are never painful. Many people experience flashes or floaters and these are not necessarily a cause for alarm. However, if they are severe and seem to be getting worse, and/or vision is being lost, a doctor should be seen urgently. Prompt treatment can often minimise the damage to the eye.

What is the treatment?

With early help, it may only be necessary to have laser or freezing treatment. This is usually performed under a local anaesthetic. Often however, an operation to repair the hole in the retina will be needed. This is usually done under a general anaesthetic and can be repaired in a single operation in 90% of cases. This does not usually cause pain, but the eye will be sore and swollen afterwards. The patient will usually need to stay in hospital for two or three days after the operation.

Macular Degeneration

Sometimes the delicate cells of the macula become damaged and stop working. We do not know why this is, although it tends to happen as people get older. This is called age-related macula degeneration. Because macula degeneration is an age-related process it usually involves both eyes, although they may not be affected at the same time. With many people the visual cells simply cease to function, like the colours fading in an old photograph - this is known as "dry" degeneration. Sometimes there is scarring of the macula caused by the leaking blood vessels and this is called disciform maculopathy. Children and young people can also suffer from an inherited form of macular degeneration called macular dystrophy. Sometimes several members of a family will suffer from this, and if this is the case, it is very important that eyes are checked regularly.

Macular degeneration is not painful and never leads to total blindness. It is the most common cause of poor eyesight in people over 60, but never leads to complete sight loss because it is only the central vision that is affected. Macula degeneration never affects vision at the outer edges of the eye. This means that almost everyone with macula degeneration will have enough side vision to get around and keep their Independence.

What are the symptoms ?

In the early stages central vision may be blurred or distorted, with things looking an unusual size or shape. This may happen quickly or develop over several months. One may be very sensitive to light or actually see lights that are not there. This may cause some discomfort occasionally, but otherwise macular degeneration is not painful. The macula enables people to see fine details and those with the advanced condition will often notice a blank patch or dark spot in the centre of their sight. This makes activities like reading, writing and recognising small objects or faces very difficult.