

Retinitis Pigmentosa

This material will help you understand retinitis pigmentosa, its causes, and how it is treated.

What is retinitis pigmentosa?

Retinitis pigmentosa (RP) refers to a group of diseases that affect the retina's ability to respond to light. If you compare the eye to an old-fashioned camera, the retina is the thin layer of "film" that lines the back of the eye. It captures images that pass through the front of the eye and then sends them to the brain. The retina is made up of cells called rods and cones. With RP, these cells begin to die. This can lead to slow and gradual vision loss. Night vision is usually affected first, later progressing to loss of peripheral, or side vision.

What causes retinitis pigmentosa?

Retinitis pigmentosa is believed to be caused by defects in certain genes. The defects can cause retina cells to break down, leading to vision loss. Most forms of RP are inherited, that is the genes are passed down in your family. It is important to tell your eye doctor if anyone in your family has RP.

What are the symptoms of retinitis pigmentosa?

RP can be seen at any age. An early symptom of RP is the loss of night vision, also known as "night blindness." Your eyes are no longer able to adjust well to darkness, which may make activities such as driving at night difficult. Symptoms can progress to loss of peripheral, or side vision. Your vision may begin to narrow, leaving only a small area of central vision. This condition is known as "tunnel vision." The rate of vision loss varies from person to person.

How is retinitis pigmentosa treated?

Genetic research is currently being done to look at the genes involved in RP, with the hope of developing treatments. This is known as gene therapy. Additionally, a retinal prosthesis is now available to restore a limited amount of vision in select patients with severe vision loss. Be sure to ask your eye doctor about any potential new treatments.

Anti-oxidant vitamins may slow the progression of certain forms of RP. It is important to talk to your eye doctor before taking these supplements. Your eye doctor can talk to you about the risks and benefits and help determine how much is safe to take.

If you are a smoker, stopping smoking is beneficial as well.

Low Vision

RP is a common cause of “low vision.” This is reduced sight that cannot be fully corrected with glasses or contact lenses. Low vision may make it hard to perform tasks such as reading or driving. There are many tools and new ways of doing things that can help you live with low vision and continue your current activities.

The Kellogg Eye Center Low Vision Clinic provides services that can help people experiencing loss of vision. Specialists there will work with you to develop a plan and teach you skills that will allow you to make the most of your remaining vision.

To learn more about these services, visit the Low Vision Clinic’s website at <http://www.kellogg.umich.edu/lowvision/index.html> or call their office at (734) 764-5106.

For more information, scan these codes with your smartphone or visit the websites listed.



<http://www.kellogg.umich.edu/patientcare/conditions/pigmentosa.html>



<http://www.geteyesmart.org/eyesmart/diseases/retinitis-pigmentosa.cfm>

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