

Retinal tears - Patient Information

What is a retinal tear?

The retina is a thin layer of light sensitive cells that lie at the back of the eye. Generally the retina is between 70 to 200 thousandths of a millimetre thick. It is attached to the gel in the eye - called the vitreous. As we get older the vitreous gel detaches from the back of the eye, it falls forward and pulls on the retina. Many patients experience flashing of lights at this stage as the retina is stimulated by the gel. If there is a weakness in the retina a tear forms. Without treatment retinal tears can cause retinal detachments and vision from the eye can be lost.

How is a tear treated?

A green laser is used to seal up the retinal tear. It heats the blood in the surrounding healthy retina and 'spot welds' this to the underlying tissues, preventing retinal detachment. The treatment is known as retinopexy.

What happens during treatment?

The treatment can take place in theatre or in the outpatients department. First your pupils will be dilated with drops, this takes about 20 minutes. Then an anaesthetic drop will be put in your eye, and a contact lens to focus the laser onto your retina. A series of laser spots will be used to seal the retina in place. You will see bright flashes of light which sometimes cause discomfort. The laser alternatively may be delivered through a device worn on the doctor's head.

What happens after treatment?

Immediately after the laser your eye will be blurry due to the drops and dazzled by the laser light. Your vision will be misty for a few hours and should be back to normal by the next day. You should not drive on the day of your laser treatment.

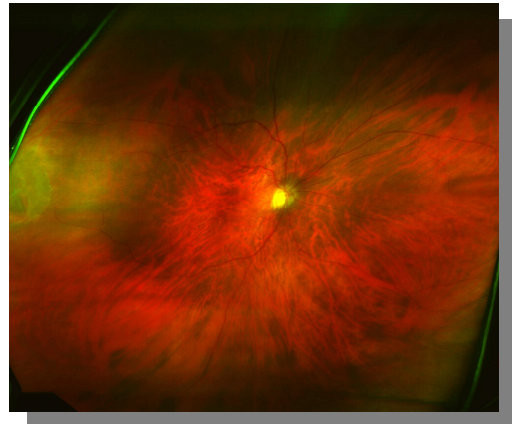
Can the retina detach after laser treatment?

Laser treatment reduces the risk of retinal detachment but it does not eliminate it completely. If you notice, more flashes and floaters or a dark shadow coming over your eye should seek help immediately, by calling my secretary.

Are there any risks to laser retinopexy?

Laser treatment is generally safe, however there is a risk that the retina can bleed or develop central scar tissue that distortion the vision. These problems can be treated with surgery.

An Optomap showing a Retinal tear



Is there any research into retinal tears?

There is a new method of diagnosing retinal tears which uses a wide field photograph known as an [Optomap](#). It is useful in imaging the peripheral retina. At present we are assessing whether it can be used in a casualty setting.

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