

Plaza Del Rio Eye Clinic, P.C.

Ocular Migraine

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Ocular migraines cause visual symptoms or loss lasting less than an hour, sometimes followed by a headache. Experts sometimes call these episodes "retinal" or "ophthalmic" migraines.

Diagnosing ocular migraine requires a health care professional to rule out other conditions that can cause similar symptoms. Being able to describe the symptoms properly is important for helping your doctor determine whether you actually have an ocular migraine.

Ocular Migraine Symptoms

According to the International Headache Society's definition of this condition -- which it calls retinal migraine -- symptoms include:

Vision problems that affect one eye. These problems include:

- flashing lights
- blind spots in your field of vision
- scintillations
- arcs or zig-zags of light

A regular migraine with an aura can also have flashing lights and blind spots in the vision, and is a more common problem. This type affects about 20% of people who have migraines.

Ocular Migraine Causes

Experts aren't sure what causes ocular migraines. Some feel that the problem is related to:

- Spasms in blood vessels in the retina. That's the delicate lining in the back of the eye.
- Changes that spread across the nerve cells in the retina.

Diagnosing Ocular Migraine

To diagnose ocular migraine, your doctor will ask you about your symptoms and examine your eyes.

The doctor will try to rule out other problems that could be causing similar effects. These include:

- Amaurosis fugax. This is temporary blindness due to lack of blood flow to the eye. The symptoms can be due to a blockage in an artery leading to the eye.
- Spasms in the artery that supplies the retina with blood.
- Giant cell arteritis. This causes inflammation in blood vessels. It can lead to vision problems and blindness.
- Conditions that encourage abnormal blood clotting. These include sickle cell disease and polycythemia.

Ocular Migraine Treatment

There's been little research to determine the best course of medications to treat or prevent ocular migraines. However, your doctor may recommend one or more of the following drugs:

- Aspirin
- Drugs used to treat seizures, such as Depakote or Topromaz (topiramate) can be used to help prevent ocular migraines in particularly bad cases.
- Tricyclic antidepressants, such as Elavil (amitriptyline) or Pamelor (nortriptyline), can also be used to help prevent ocular migraines.