

# Plaza Del Rio Eye Clinic, P.C.

## *Retinal Vascular Occlusion*

### **Retinal Vascular Occlusion**

#### **What Is Retinal Vascular Occlusion?**

Retinal vascular occlusion affects the eye, specifically the retina. An occlusion occurs when one of the veins or arteries carrying blood to or from the retina becomes blocked or contains a blood clot. The blockage could occur in the main vein or main artery. Blockages could also occur in the branch of veins and arteries throughout the retina.

A blockage in the vein or artery of the retina can cause blood or other fluids to build up and inhibit the retina's ability to filter light properly. When light is blocked or fluids are present, sudden loss of vision can occur. The severity of vision loss may be dependent upon where the blockage or clot occurred. Blockages in the main vein or artery are often more serious than blockages in the branch veins or arteries.

Retinal vascular occlusion is a potentially serious condition, especially if hardening of the arteries (atherosclerosis) already exists.

#### **Causes of Retinal Vascular Occlusion**

While the specific cause of vascular blockage or blood clots in the retina is unknown, there are several risk factors:

- blood clots (they often travel from elsewhere in the body to the eye)
- blockage or narrowing in the carotid arteries of the neck
- atherosclerosis
- heart problems, including irregular rhythm or valve issues
- diabetes
- high blood pressure
- high cholesterol
- drug use (when drugs are injected intravenously)
- being over the age of 60
- glaucoma (a condition that damages the optic nerve)
- smoking
- rare blood disorders

#### **Symptoms of Retinal Vascular Occlusion**

The primary symptom of retinal vascular occlusion is a sudden change in vision. This could be blurriness, partial loss of the visual field, or complete loss of vision. Most often the vision symptoms occur only in one eye. There is no physical pain associated with retinal vascular occlusion.

The changes in eyesight could be short term or permanent, depending on your situation.

### **Diagnosing Retinal Vascular Occlusion**

To diagnose retinal vascular occlusion, your doctor will perform a comprehensive eye examination. The examination will check vision, pressure within the eye, and the physical appearance of the eye, among other things. Your doctor will assess the function and look of the pupil. Your doctor may also measure your blood pressure and suggest a blood test to check for blood clotting conditions.

If the doctor suspects blood clots coming from elsewhere in the body, your doctor may suggest other tests such as an echocardiogram, carotid artery study, and a heart monitor to check your heart's rhythm. These tests will assess the heart and vascular system.

### **Preventing Retinal Vascular Occlusion**

Since retinal vascular occlusion stems from vascular issues, the best prevention is to make lifestyle and dietary changes to protect your blood vessels. These changes include:

- exercising
- losing weight or maintaining a healthy weight
- not smoking or quitting smoking
- controlling diabetes
- taking aspirin or other blood thinners (consult your doctor first)

### **Treating Retinal Vascular Occlusion**

In most cases, retinal vascular occlusion is not treated, and many patients will regain some of their vision over time. You are not likely to regain full vision because the blockage in the vein or artery will still be there without treatment.

In more serious cases, treatment may be necessary. If your doctor is concerned about blockages in your other eye, he or she would need to discuss a treatment or prevention plan to ensure your other eye keeps functioning normally.

To treat retinal vascular occlusion, your doctor may recommend medication such as blood thinners or injections into the eye. Another option is laser therapy.

### **Outlook for Retinal Vascular Occlusion**

The outlook for retinal vascular occlusion depends on the severity of the condition. Many people will recover and regain some of their vision capabilities. However, it is possible that your vision will not return. Retinal vascular occlusion is a potentially serious condition. If the clot continues to move throughout your blood stream, it could cause a stroke.

Those with other eye conditions or complications from retinal vascular occlusion such as complete vision loss or glaucoma may not fully recover. You will need to work with your doctor to ensure your eye conditions are managed properly.