

EPIRETINAL MEMBRANE

What is epiretinal membrane?

Epiretinal membrane is condition where a very thin membrane (scar) forms on the surface of the retina like a layer of cling-film. This membrane can contract and form wrinkles on the retina. This is different from age-related macular degeneration.

Why does epiretinal membrane occur?

Epiretinal membrane can form for no reason. However, it can be associated with a retinal tear or previous treatment for retinal detachment, laser or cryotherapy, retinal vascular disease, uveitis or trauma.

What tests do I need?

The diagnosis is usually made clinically. An OCT (optical coherence tomography) imaging can help confirm the diagnosis and assess its severity.

Does it need treatment?

Most patients with early epiretinal membrane have very mild distortion and vision remains good and therefore treatment is not necessary for many years. However, if the epiretinal membrane thickens, this will produce more distortion and visual loss. This would be the most ideal time for surgery.

How can epiretinal membrane be treated?

A surgical procedure called pars plana vitrectomy is performed to treat epiretinal membrane. This is performed by making 3 tiny holes are made in the sclera (white of the eye) and the vitreous jelly is removed followed by the epiretinal membrane very gently peeled away from the surface of the retina. If there is a co-existing cataract, this can be removed at the same time.



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What happens if my epiretinal membrane is not treated?

If symptoms are very mild in terms of distortion and still maintaining good vision, surgery is not required for many years. The best time to have surgery is when the distortion is affecting the central vision and ability to do fine tasks such as reading or recognising faces. The peripheral (side) views will never be affected and the eye will never go blind in a patient with epiretinal membrane.

What are the risks of surgery?

Most surgery is uncomplicated with 80-90% have improvement in vision and less distortion in their vision. However, complications can occasionally happen and the significant ones are early cataract formation, infection, bleeding in the eye and retinal detachment.

