



HOLE IN THE RETINA

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OUR EYES are the windows to the world and as such we have to protect it with the greatest care. Yet not many people realise they may be having a hole in the retina, which may lead to retinal detachment and blindness.

Although it is relatively unknown, retinal holes and tears are quite common and affects about one in 10,000 people, usually those with acute myopia as their elongated eyeball stretches the retinal layer and causes it to thin in some parts, usually at the periphery and hidden part of the eyeball.

Most people have no symptoms and do not realise they have this problem until they go for a thorough eye examination by a qualified ophthalmologist equipped with the latest equipment to explore the hidden corners of

the eye. And once detected, it is recommended that one seeks treatment immediately, or the condition may worsen, like a ticking time-bomb.

Consultant Ophthalmic Cornea & Refractive Surgeon Dr Shamala Ganesan from VISTA Eye Specialist in Bangsar, Kuala Lumpur said retinal holes and tears are small breaks in the retina. Usually holes and tears do not mean you will have serious vision problems right away. However, it may cause problem if the fluid from the vitreous area - a transparent jelly filling the space between the lens and the retina, seep behind the retina,

"If a lot of fluid gets behind the retina, the retina can separate from the back of the eye like a wallpaper peeling off a wall. The detached part of the retina is a serious condition where it will not work properly and can lead to total blindness if not treated promptly."

Dr. Shamala said the common reason why it occurs is due to traction by liquefied vitreous at a weak spot in the retina.

"Liquefying of the vitreous sometimes exerts enough force to pull on the retina areas where the vitreous is "stuck" to the retina which may cause a tear/hole in the retina,

"Other types of breaks seem to be related to changes due to aging which occur in both the retina and vitreous body. As one gets older, the vitreous tends to liquify slightly and take on a more watery consistency."

Direct blow to the eye may also cause the retina to tear away from its attachment.

Other problems which may increase the risk of retinal holes and tears in an eye include:

Severe Myopia (-5.00 to -6.00 Diopter) - Eyes are longer and retina is stretched thin, eye/head trauma or injuries, cataract or certain other types of eye surgery, and a history of retinal holes or tears in your other eye, or hereditary.

Dr. Shamala said most of the holes are in the retinal periphery, which causes no symptoms. However it may be associated with sudden flashes of light (photopsia), floaters/ smokes/ cobwebs, cloudy, blurry, or wavy vision, and a dark shadow or curtain in your peripheral (side) vision.

"Once there is presence of

these symptoms one should go for an immediate eye check up."

To diagnose the problem the ophthalmologist will first dilate you eyes with eyedrops. She will examine your eyes through an ophthalmoscope/ slitlamp (a lighted instrument for examining the inside of the eye) and a special lens." Upon diagnosis, the ophthalmologist may feel that it's necessary to prevent the occurrence of retinal detachment.

The main type of treatment is laser photocoagulation where highly focused beams of argon laser seal the tissue around the hole or tear, thus welding the surrounding retina around the hole and preventing fluid from detaching the retina.

The procedure is generally quick (few minutes) and painless. The eyes are dilated for this procedure. Vision may be blurred for a few hours after. Eyedrops need to be use for a short period of time after.

Dr. Shamala said: "Treatments for retinal holes and tears are usually successful. However, the effect of the treatment is not immediate. That is, the holes do not seal immediately at the time of the treatment.

"Some retinal holes do not need treatment, but should be checked regularly,

"There is also a chance that you will have a retinal hole or tear in another part of your eye later."

She added one should get their eyes examined regularly and make sure the doctor checking you knows you have had retinal problems, especially if symptoms of floaters or flashes develop.

"Other than protecting your eyes from injury, there is no way to prevent retinal holes and tears. However, you can help prevent blindness if you see your eye doctor for regular checkups or as soon as you have symptoms of flashes and floaters," she added.

