



Wasatch View Eye Care

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## **Retinal Detachment**

### **Overview**

A retinal detachment is a very serious condition where the sensory layer inside of the eye called the retina tears and separates from the eye. If it is not treated promptly, permanent vision loss or blindness can occur. Symptoms of a retinal detachment include flashes of light, loss of vision and numerous new floaters.

Causes of a retinal detachment include ocular trauma or surgery, high amounts of myopia, vitreous traction (the jelly-like portion of the eye pulling on the retina) and conditions that cause abnormal bleeding in the eye. To assess for a retinal detachment the eyes need to be dilated and then a thorough look at all parts of the retina needs to be done. Treatment involves injecting a gas bubble in the eye forcing the attached retina in place or suturing a sponge to the white portion of the eye that prevents further traction from the vitreous. Lasers or freezing are sometimes used to scar areas of the retina to prevent a detachment or limit further detachment.



### **Signs & Symptoms**

One of the most common symptoms of a retinal detachment is seeing flashes of light. The flashes of light can appear as small sparks or as bright as “lightning strikes.” A new onset of numerous floaters is also commonly seen because of material that gets released into the vitreous when the retina detaches. Loss of peripheral vision is another symptom and is similar to a “veil” being placed over a patient’s vision. The amount and area of vision loss depends on where and how much of the retina has detached. If the macula has been detached, vision loss can be very significant.

### **Causes**

Causes of a retinal detachment are usually from some type of trauma, stretching or traction to the retina. An injury to the eye can cause a detachment. Retinal detachments are more common after cataract surgery where there stress is placed on the eye. High amounts of myopia have an elongated eyeball that stretches the retina and increases the likelihood of a detachment. High amounts of myopia are associated with lattice degeneration, which have higher occurrences of retinal detachments. When the vitreous is attached to the retina and pulls away in a posterior vitreous detachment, a retinal detachment is also more likely. Conditions like diabetic retinopathy that cause the growth of abnormal “leaky” blood vessels called neovascularization may cause retinal detachments.

### **Testing and Evaluation**

To determine if there is a retinal detachment a dilated fundus exam needs to be done by your eye doctor. Drops are placed in the eyes that are going to make the pupils larger. Next high powered lenses and ophthalmoscopes are going to be used to look at all areas of the retina.

## **Treatment**

If the retinal detachment is a small peripheral tear or hole it can be lasered in place to prevent it from spreading as shown in the image below. Another procedure for treating a larger retinal detachment is called a pneumatic retinopexy. In this procedure a gas bubble is injected into the eye to float the retina in place. This procedure may require a patient to orient themselves in a particular position to place the bubble in the retina properly for reattachment. Scarring a portion of the retina with a laser or freezing may also be done to secure it in place, limit further detachment or prevent detachment. A scleral buckle may also be done to limit vitreous traction on the retina. In this procedure a silicone or sponge buckle is sutured to the sclera or white portion of the eye. Prompt treatment is extremely important for retinal detachments and should be treated as an emergency!



## **Websites**

All About Vision: <http://www.allaboutvision.com/conditions/retinadetach.htm>

American Optometric Association:  
<https://www.aoa.org/healthy-eyes/eye-and-vision-conditions/retinal-detachment?sso=y>

National Eye Institute:  
<https://www.nei.nih.gov/learn-about-eye-health/eye-conditions-and-diseases/retinal-detachment>

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