

Retinal Pigmentosa

What is Retinitis Pigmentosa?

Retinitis pigmentosa (RP) refers to a group of diseases which tend to run in families and cause slow, but progressive loss of vision. The retina is the tissue which lines the inside of the eye and sends visual images to the brain. In RP, there is gradual destruction of some of the light sensing cells in the retina.

Causes and Symptoms

The cause of retinitis pigmentosa has not been clearly identified. About fifty percent of RP cases are sporadic with the remaining cases being hereditary. Learning more about the history of people with RP may help predict how the disease will progress for the affected person, although variations can exist even from person to person within a family.

The first symptoms usually start during young adulthood, although it may be seen first at any age. The two most common symptoms are night blindness (where adjusting to the dark happens very slowly) and the loss of side vision. Loss of side or peripheral vision makes mobility very difficult. Once this occurs, a person is left with only central vision (as if looking down a tunnel).

Treatment

While developments are on the horizon--particularly in the area of genetic research--as yet, there is no cure for retinitis pigmentosa. The retina is attached to the optic nerve and transplants are not yet an option.

Unfortunately, there is no scientific evidence to demonstrate benefits from any treatment methods--including vitamin supplements--currently available.

One controversial treatment, currently available in Cuba, consists of a combination of ozone therapy (removing a small amount of blood from the eye, adding ozone, and replacing it a short while later), electrical stimulation, dietary supplements and so-called "oligoelements", and eye surgery under a local anesthetic. The rationale behind these procedures is to improve the supply of oxygen and nutrients to the affected parts of the eye.

As yet, this procedure has not been subject to critical review and, as such, remains outside the medical mainstream. The Cuban clinic where it has been performed has repeatedly refused to show the procedure to anyone outside of the clinic. As such, critical review is very difficult. There have been reports of physical damage to some

patients including detached retinas, crossed eyes, and sensitivity to light. Because of this, most of research organizations have called the procedure into question.

For the latest treatments, please see your ophthalmologist.