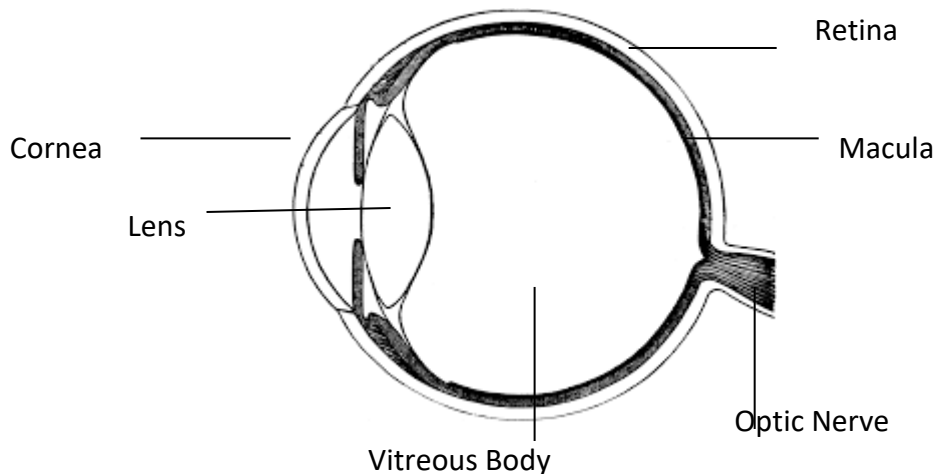


EPIRETINAL MEMBRANE

What is an Epiretinal Membrane?

An Epiretinal Membrane (ERM) is a condition where a very thin layer of scar tissue forms on the surface of the retina. The ERM may affect the macula which is the area used for seeing fine detail eg reading and driving. When an ERM forms over the macula it may contract and crumple up the macula resulting in distorted and/or blurred vision.



Why do I have an Epiretinal Membrane?

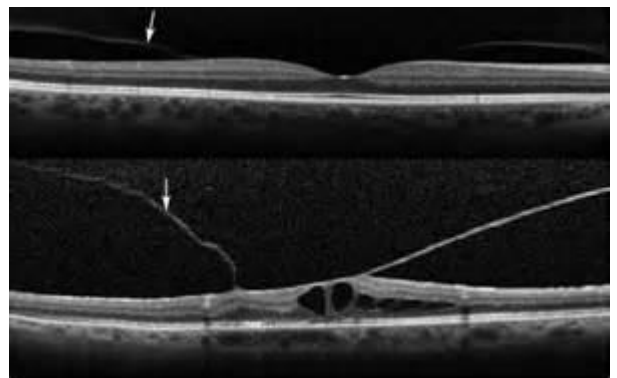
In most cases the development of an ERM appears to be related to normal aging changes inside the eye. In some cases it can be related to other conditions such as diabetes, blockage of a blood vessel, inflammation or following retinal surgery. Epiretinal membranes are not related to Macular Degeneration and do not always affect the other eye. They are quite common and affect up to 8% of people in later years.

Assessment for Epiretinal Membrane

Your eye doctor is able to detect an ERM during an eye examination following the use of eye drops that temporarily make your pupils large. Often a special scan called an OCT is used to confirm the presence of an ERM. Your eye doctor will assess your symptoms to help you decide whether to proceed with surgery.

OCT cross- section of normal macula

OCT cross-section of macula with epiretinal membrane



What to expect with a diagnosis of Epiretinal Membrane

In many cases, the discovery of an ERM is by chance at a routine examination and the vision may not be affected. These ERMs tend not to change. ERMs can occasionally get worse causing blurring and/or distortion of vision. Treatment for ERM is only required in cases where vision has been affected.

Epiretinal Membrane Removal

If an ERM affects vision, the only way to treat it is to remove the membrane surgically. This is achieved by an operation called a Vitrectomy, where specialised instruments remove the vitreous which is the jelly-like substance that normally fills the back of the eye. The removal of the vitreous inside the eye does not cause any permanent harm, although it may speed up the development of a cataract. The vitreous is replaced by a natural fluid produced inside the eye. In some cases, the surgeon has to leave a special gas bubble inside the eye which disappears on its own in a few weeks.

The operation for ERM removal does not usually take longer than an hour and it can be performed using a local anaesthetic injection with the patient remaining comfortable and awake during the procedure. It is very important for the patient to stay as still as possible.

Following ERM removal, the vision is typically more blurred and it can take months for it to improve. The operation is usually successful in reducing the distortion in vision; however the vision may never be completely sharp.

Risks of Surgery for Epiretinal Membrane Removal

Surgery for ERM speeds up the onset of cataract which is a very treatable cause of worsening vision. Sometimes an early cataract is removed at the same time as the membrane removal to spare the patient from cataract surgery in the near future. ERM removal carries the risk of 1 in 50 cases of ending up with significantly worse vision and 1 in 50 may require further surgery for recurrent ERM or other complications such as retinal detachment.

The risk of a serious complication is 1 in 1000 cases, where vision may be lost due to a bleed during surgery or infection afterwards. Some patients may develop persistent high pressure (Glaucoma) in the eye causing damage to the nerve resulting in vision loss. It may require long term use of eye drops and sometimes surgery to lower pressure and preserve vision.

What should I do following surgery?

Following surgery, you will be given eye drops to use for a few weeks to help the eye settle. The operation does not usually require staying in hospital longer than 1 night and patients are normally reviewed at Kotara Eye Specialists in the following (day/week?) In some occasions, you may be required to position your head in a certain way for a number of days.

How much time off work will I need?

Most people will need at least two weeks off work after surgery. The amount of time off work will depend on the kind of work you do and the kind of surgery done. This will need to be discussed with your surgeon

See **Vitrectomy Surgery** handout for further information.

Please contact Dr KL Lee if you have any questions:

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