

## Epiretinal membrane

The retina is a thin film of tissue that lines the inside of the back of the eye (much like the film in a camera). Images are focused on the retina and the visual information is sent to the brain for us to see. The macula is the part of the retina that deals with central vision and the remainder of the retina is responsible for peripheral vision.

An epiretinal membrane is an abnormal layer of tissue that grows across the surface of the retina. It can cause wrinkling and distortion of the retina. If the membrane grows over the macula it can cause blurred vision or distortion (straight lines appear crooked) but will not cause total blindness.

An epiretinal membrane occurs when cells that should be beneath the surface of retina, break through the surface and form a new layer. This can occur for no known reason at all. It can also be a result of the jelly inside the eye collapsing which happens to everyone as we get older (this is called a posterior vitreous detachment). Epiretinal membranes can also occur after conditions such as a torn retina, blocked blood vessels, diabetes changes affecting the retina, and inflammation inside the eye. Epiretinal membrane can also occur after surgery involving the retina.

Epiretinal membranes can sometimes be seen by an optometrist or ophthalmologist when they look inside your eye. A retinal scan (OCT) is required to confirm this.

Many patients with an epiretinal membrane require no treatment at all if there is no noticeable effect on vision. Ongoing monitoring should be performed to make sure there is no deterioration. If the distortion affects your ability to work, drive, read, or perform other important activities, you should consider having an operation.

If treatment is required then surgery to remove the epiretinal membrane is the only treatment available. You will need to see a specialist retinal surgeon if it is thought this may be required, they will help you decide if surgery is appropriate for you. Patients who do have surgery will usually notice an improvement in vision but vision will often not return to normal levels. It will usually take months for the eye to fully settle after surgery. As with any surgery there are risks with epiretinal membrane surgery, these include no improvement or vision getting worse, retinal detachment and infection. This would all be discussed with the retinal surgeon prior to the procedure.

