



**Foundation
Fighting Blindness**

Driving research to save & restore sight

Retinitis Pigmentosa – FAQ's

What are Retinal Degenerative Diseases?

Retinal degenerative diseases are a family of disorders that cause degeneration of the retina.

What is Retinitis Pigmentosa?

Retinitis pigmentosa (RP) is a group of inherited disorders that cause degeneration of the retina. They occur in many variations and progress at different rates for different people.

The retina is the delicate innermost layer of tissue that lines the eye. It contains layers of light receiving cells called photoreceptors that are connected to the brain by the optic nerve. If you think of the eye as a camera, the retina is the film on which images are recorded.

What causes Retinitis Pigmentosa?

Retinitis pigmentosa is a genetic disorder. It is programmed into your cells, not caused by injury, infection or any other external agent. Genetic defects (mutations) send faulty messages to the retinal cells which leads to their progressive degeneration, which in turn, leads to vision loss.

Because retinitis pigmentosa is an inherited disorder, it is strongly recommended that if someone in your family is diagnosed with a retinal degenerative disease that all members of the family contact a retinal specialist.

What are the symptoms of Retinitis Pigmentosa?

- Loss of or diminished night vision. One of the earliest & most frequent
 - Loss of or diminished peripheral vision
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Can my Ophthalmologist Diagnose Retinitis Pigmentosa?

Possibly, however, if you experience either of the symptoms noted above and your ophthalmologist isn't certain, you should consult with a retinal specialist. The Foundation maintains a list of doctors who specialize in retinal degenerative diseases.

Are There Special Tests to Diagnose Retinitis Pigmentosa?

Yes.

Acuity Tests: This test measures the accuracy of your central vision at specific distances in specific lighting situations.

Color Testing: This can help determine the status of your cone cells, the retinal cells that interpret color.

Visual Field Test: This test uses a machine to measure how much peripheral vision you have.

Dark Adaptation Test: This test will measure how well your eyes adjust to changes in lighting and can help the doctor better understand the current function of your rod cells, which are the retinal cells responsible for night vision.

ERG Test: The ERG (electrophysiological test) records the electrical currents produced by the retina due to a light stimulus. The intensity and speed of the electrical signal becomes reduced as the photoreceptor cells degenerate.

How do I Find a Doctor Familiar with Retinal Degenerations?

The FFB maintains a list of retinal specialists. All of the eye care professionals on this referral list have indicated their interest in treating people with inherited retinal degenerative diseases. For a copy of the list for your home state, please

contact The Foundation at 1-800-683-5555.

How Quickly Does Retinitis Pigmentosa Progress?

It's different for every patient.

Can RP Lead to Total Blindness?

A majority of people with RP are legally blind by the age of 40. Legally blind individuals are those whose best visual sharpness or acuity (with glasses or contact lenses, if needed) is 20/200 or worse in their better eye; or whose visual field, regardless of acuity, is restricted to a 20 degree diameter (10 degree radius).

Is there a Treatment for Retinitis Pigmentosa?

A daily dose of 15,000 I.U. of Vitamin A can moderately slow the progression of RP. There are also several areas of research that offer tremendous promise for halting the disease or restoring vision loss:

- Retinal Cell Transplantation
- Gene Therapy
- Pharmaceutical Therapy
- Nutritional Therapy

For additional information on these or any other areas of our research, please scroll back to the Home Page or to the Master RP Page.

What Are Some of the Questions I Should Ask My Eye Doctor?

- What is the name of my eye condition?
- What is my visual acuity (central vision)?
- What is my visual field (side vision)?
- Am I likely to lose more vision?
- Are there other tests?
- Are there any surgical options?
- Are there any optical or non-optical aids that can help me use my remaining vision better?

- Should I have a low-vision evaluation?
- Are there any mobility aids to help me move around more safely?