

REFERENCES

The system of references used in this study is in accordance with the Vancouver Style⁽²⁴²⁾ set in 1979 by the International Steering Committee of Medical Editors (ISCME) and with American National Standard for Bibliographic References.⁽²⁴³⁾

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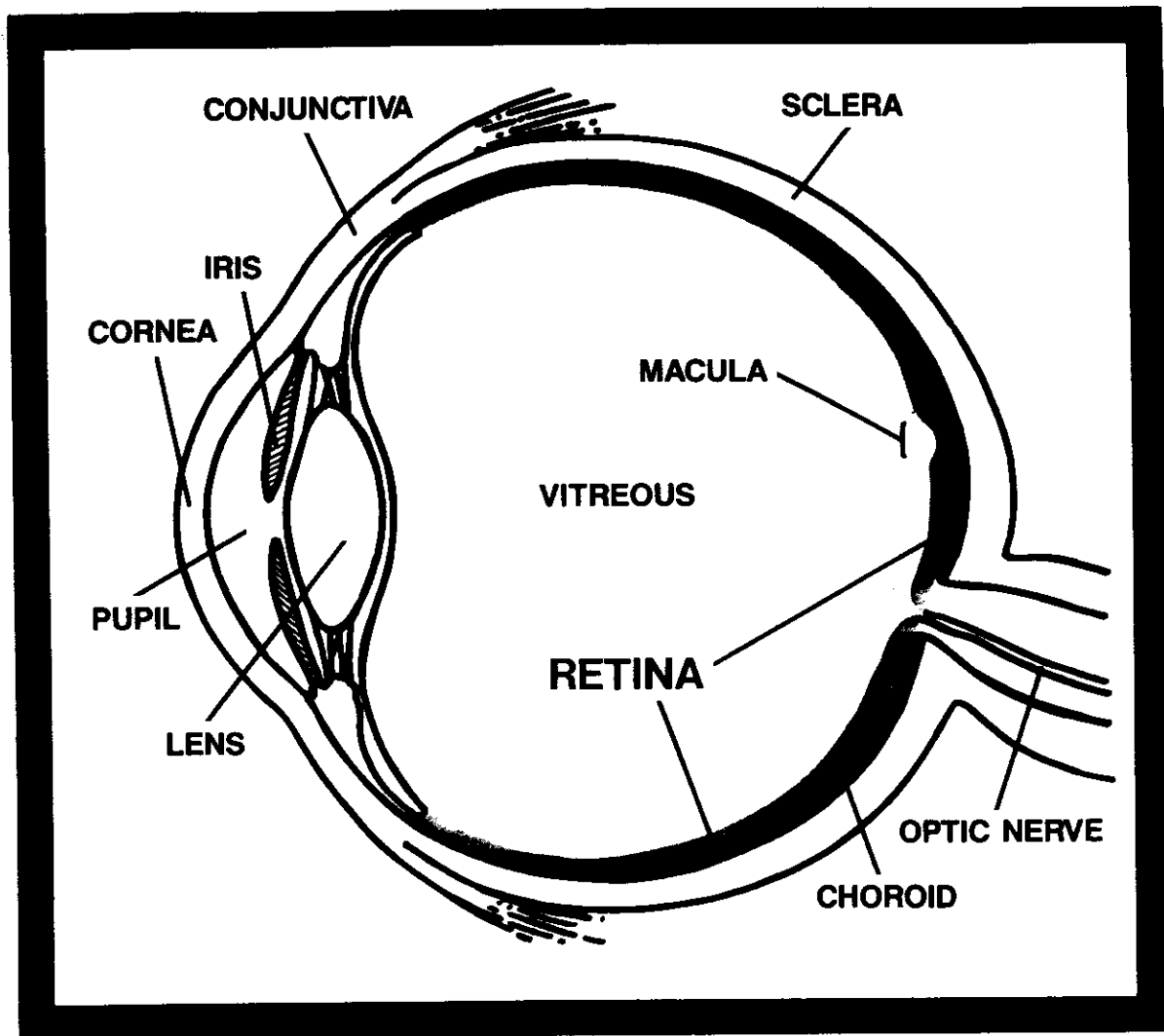
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**Answers
To Your
Questions About
Retinitis
Pigmentosa
& Other Retinal Degenerative Diseases.**



**RP Foundation Fighting Blindness
National Headquarters**



1. WHAT IS RETINITIS PIGMENTOSA (RP)?

RP is the name given to a group of diseases which affect the retina. The retina, located in back of the eye, acts like the film in a camera. It is a delicate layer of cells which picks up the picture and transmits it to the brain—where “seeing” actually occurs. In RP, the retina begins to degenerate, which first causes peripheral vision and night vision to diminish, and usually only decades later, central vision.

2. WHAT ARE THE EARLY SYMPTOMS OF RP?

Often, one of the earliest symptoms of RP is difficulty seeing at night or in dimly lit places (night blindness). Later there is a very gradual loss of side (peripheral) vision, resulting in “tunnel vision” in some cases. The symptoms of RP generally worsen over a period of years. When other members of a family are also affected, the rate of vision loss is usually similar to that experienced by the other affected members.

3. CAN RP BE EASILY DIAGNOSED?

Because each case of RP can be so different, sometimes it is easy to diagnose and other times it is not. Generally, RP is most difficult to diagnose in the earliest stages. As the disease advances, some characteristic changes in the appearance of the retina begin to occur. Depending on the stage of the disease, various tests may need to be done. Electroretinogram (ERG), visual field and other tests of visual function may be required to determine the precise state of the retina. Whenever RP is suspected, a patient should have a thorough evaluation by an ophthalmologist who is familiar with retinal degenerations.

4. WHAT CAUSES RP?

We know that certain cells in the retina—the rods and cones—stop functioning. However, we do not know what causes this degeneration. Research provides us with the opportunity to seek solutions.

5. WHO IS DOING THE RESEARCH ON RP?

Through the efforts of the RP Foundation Fighting Blindness, the number of highly qualified scientific investigators working full time on RP and related diseases continues to grow. One reason research efforts in this type of retinal disease are difficult is because there is no means of safely removing living tissue from the delicate eye in order to study it.

6. WHAT IS AN RP RESEARCH CENTER?

The RP Foundation Fighting Blindness supports extensive research at a number of major medical centers and hospitals around the world. The purpose is to find the causes, means of prevention and treatments of retinal degenerative diseases such as retinitis pigmentosa, Usher's syndrome and macular degeneration. Most of these centers also provide clinical evaluations and special testing. Even with these evaluations, it is important for patients with RP to remain in the care of their own eye doctor for general eye care.

7. DO THESE RESEARCH CENTERS STUDY OTHER RETINAL DEGENERATIONS?

Researchers at RP centers also study many other related diseases which affect the retina. Often, the term RP is used to encompass all of these. Research toward understanding one retinal degeneration may contribute to the understanding of related retinal disorders.

8. IS THERE A TREATMENT TO ARREST THE PROGRESSION OF RP?

Currently there is no way to halt the degeneration of the retina. Many speculative attempts at “treatments” have been undertaken over the past years, but there is no convincing scientific evidence to demonstrate any benefits from these attempts at treatment. In fact, most of these are unregulated experiments on humans. Our scientists follow up all reasonable treatment possibilities in their vigorous search for a retinal therapy.

9. IF I AM DIAGNOSED WITH RP, HOW QUICKLY WILL IT PROGRESS?

Most RP patients have a very gradual progression of symptoms, often over a period of many years or even decades. Vision often remains stable between annual examinations.

10. CAN RP CAUSE BLINDNESS?

Blindness, to most people, refers to a complete loss of sight. Although some RP patients with advancing age do become blind in this sense, most will retain at least some vision, and are classified as “legally blind.” Each individual case differs.

11. WHAT IS MEANT BY THE TERM “LEGAL BLINDNESS”?

Legally blind individuals are those whose best visual sharpness or acuity (with glasses, if needed) is 20/200 or worse in the better eye; or whose visual field, regardless of visual acuity, is restricted to a 20 degree diameter (10 degree radius).

12. IS RP ASSOCIATED WITH OTHER PROBLEMS?

Usually it is not; however, some people with RP also have hearing loss present at birth or shortly thereafter. When this occurs it is called Usher’s syndrome. On rare occasions, RP may be associated with other syndromes.

13. WHAT ABOUT CATARACTS AND RP?

It is not unusual for an individual with RP to develop a cataract, which is a clouding of the lens of the eye. Cataracts that significantly interfere with vision can be surgically removed. Whether or not surgery improves the vision often depends on the extent of retinal changes. Because surgery is not for everyone, it is necessary to discuss its advisability with an ophthalmologist.

14. DOES NIGHT BLINDNESS MEAN A PERSON HAS RETINITIS PIGMENTOSA?

No. Night blindness can be a symptom of a number of retinal disorders besides RP, and in some cases does not represent a progressive eye disorder. Diagnosis requires expert evaluation.

15. CAN AN EYE TRANSPLANT BE PERFORMED?

No. The retina (the layer of cells in the eye affected by RP) is connected to the brain, and, within the limits of current scientific knowledge, cannot successfully be transplanted. Although you may hear people talk about “eye transplants”, they are referring to corneal transplants, which have no relationship to RP.

16. WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF VITAMIN TREATMENTS?

As far as our scientific advisers can ascertain, it is not known if vitamin treatments are helpful in treating retinitis pigmentosa. There is no proven vitamin deficiency or shortage in patients with RP. Thousands of people affected by RP have taken large quantities of vitamins, especially vitamin A, without proven beneficial effect. However, scientists are continuing to study this matter.

17. DOES LIGHT AFFECT THE VISUAL LOSS IN RP?

There is no scientific evidence that normal levels of light increase visual loss. Persons with RP may use their eyes in ordinary light without restriction, although many are more comfortable avoiding bright lights. As a precaution, individuals with RP and other retinal degenerations are encouraged to protect their eyes from long-term exposure to bright sunlight until more is learned. Good quality sunglasses are useful for bright days outdoors.

18. THERE ARE TIMES WHEN MY VISION SEEMS BETTER AND TIMES WHEN IT SEEMS WORSE. DOES THIS HAPPEN TO OTHERS?

Yes, it does. A number of factors might account for good days or bad days for someone with RP. Some people feel they see better on cloudy days; others feel they do not see as well on cloudy days. Fatigue and emotional stress may also temporarily affect vision. All people with RP have days when, for no apparent reason, they seem to function better or worse than others.

22. IF MY CHILD IS DIAGNOSED AS HAVING A RETINAL DEGENERATIVE CONDITION SUCH AS RP, WHEN AND WHAT SHOULD I TELL HIM?

There are no hard and fast rules for when and what to explain to a child about RP. A child's need for information varies depending on age and maturity. Although children are very perceptive and quickly sense they have a visual problem, they may be able to absorb only a little information about it at a time. It is usually best to answer their questions as frankly and positively as possible, without offering more information than your child has requested. Help your child understand that some of his or her limitations may be due to the visual impairment, without using the condition as a crutch or excuse for not reaching a reasonable goal. You can reassure your child about two concerns that are frequently voiced. RP will not change the appearance of one's face or eyes. Also, most children with RP can complete their education in a regular school system.

23. CAN I DRIVE IF I HAVE RP?

This is a difficult question. Certainly many people with RP do drive legally, and drive well. Legal requirements vary widely from state to state. It would be best to discuss your visual limitations and driving with your own ophthalmologist.

24. WHAT IF MY FAMILY NEEDS HELP IN COPING WITH RP?

Families with RP may find it helpful to discuss their questions and concerns with other people who have similar problems and experiences. The RP Foundation, through its affiliates, tries to offer this opportunity. Professional guidance from a medical social worker, school counselor, psychologist, psychotherapist or genetic counselor may also be very beneficial. A list of service agencies and resources appears at the end of this booklet.

25. IF MY RP REACHES AN ADVANCED STAGE, WILL I BECOME DEPENDENT ON OTHERS?

Many aids, services and techniques are available to provide increased mobility and independence to people with RP. Some of these include orientation and mobility training, control of illumination and special lenses. A department of vocational rehabilitation or commission for the blind or visually impaired in your state offers training programs to assist in adapting to such situations as traveling, housekeeping, employment and education. Check your telephone directory under state government for these listings.

26. WILL MY CAREER BE AFFECTED?

People with retinal degenerative diseases can continue to lead productive lives and pursue career goals. By determining appropriate aids, training and other job modifications in the chosen field, potential problems can be identified and forestalled. Vocational counseling, offered through educational institutions, or state and local agencies mentioned above, can be very beneficial when planning or maintaining a career. When RP is diagnosed early, a person can often take full advantage of educational and career guidance.

27. WHAT ARE LOW VISION AIDS?

Low vision aids are devices which help people maximize the use of their remaining vision. These aids may be:

OPTICAL AIDS, such as Corning and NOIR glasses, the Fresnel Prism, telescopes, microscopes and night vision aids;

NON-OPTICAL AIDS, such as the Wide Angle Mobility Light, paper guides, large print typewriter and adjustable stands; and,

ELECTRONIC AIDS, such as Apollo Laser and Visualtek closed-circuit TV, reading machines and talking computers.

To determine which aids may help you the most, it is wise to obtain a thorough low vision evaluation from a specialist or a low vision clinic.

28. WHAT ASSISTANCE DOES THE ITT NIGHT VISION AID OFFER INDIVIDUALS WITH NIGHT BLINDNESS?

The Night Vision Aid, developed and manufactured by ITT, is a hand-held device that may help some individuals at a particular stage in their RP when they have functional daytime vision. This aid is expensive, but in some areas costs may be covered by health insurance or by state departments of rehabilitation. For further information, including a list of current Night Vision Aid Screening Centers in the United States and Canada, contact Night Vision Aid Distributors at 1401 Mt. Royal Avenue, 4th Floor, Baltimore, Maryland, 21217, or call 301-225-9400.

29. CAN I DONATE MY EYES TO THE FOUNDATION FOR RESEARCH?

In 1980, the Foundation initiated a National Retina Donor Program to meet the acute, increasing need of our researchers to study human retinal tissue. Valuable retinal tissue is obtained after death from

persons affected by retinal degenerations or members of their families. A very reliable retina donor notification and retrieval system has been developed. Eyes are prepared and shipped to our researchers as soon as possible after death to maximize the specimen's usefulness in biochemical research. The Retina Donor Program has already greatly enhanced research efforts. This precious anatomical gift involves no cost to the donor's family or estate. Contact the RP Foundation for additional information.