

Retinitis Pigmentosa



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Retinitis pigmentosa (RP) is a group of inherited diseases that damage the light-sensitive rods and cones located in the retina, the back part of our eyes. Rods, which provide side (peripheral) and night vision are affected more than the cones that provide color and clear central vision.

Signs of RP usually appear during childhood or adolescence. The first sign is often night blindness followed by a slow loss of side vision. Over the years, the disease will cause further loss of side vision. As the disease develops, people with RP may often bump into chairs and other objects as side vision worsens and they only see in one direction – straight ahead. They see as if they are in a tunnel (thus the term tunnel vision).

Fortunately, most cases of retinitis pigmentosa take a long time to develop and vision loss is gradual. It may take many years for loss of vision to be severe.

Currently, there is no cure for RP, but there is research that indicates that vitamin A and lutein may slow the rate at which the disease progresses. Your doctor of optometry can give you more specific information on nutritional supplements that may help you.

Also, there are many new low vision aids, including telescopic and magnifying lenses, night vision scopes as well as other adaptive devices, that are available that help people maximize the vision that they have remaining. An optometrist, experienced in low vision rehabilitation, can provide these devices as well as advice about other training and assistance to help people remain independent and productive.

Because it is an inherited disease, research into genetics may one day provide a prevention or cure for those who have RP.

