**Introduction**

The eye is like a camera, with lenses at the front and a film at the back. The film in the eye is called the retina. It is a thin layer of tissue which is sensitive to the image falling on it. At the very centre of the retina is the macula, which we use for detailed vision such as reading and recognising faces. An epiretinal membrane is a scar which forms on the macula, causing it to wrinkle. This is macular pucker.

What causes epiretinal membrane?

Most epiretinal membranes occur because the vitreous (jelly inside the eye) pulls away from the retina. This commonly happens over the age of 50. It can also happen if you have eye surgery or inflammation inside the eye.

How will the membrane affect my vision?

If the membrane shrinks it wrinkles the macula. This wrinkling causes distortion of central vision and blur. Straight lines become wavy or crooked in appearance and reading may be difficult.

Should I have surgery for my epiretinal membrane?

The doctor will help you to decide if surgery is appropriate for you. The main reason to proceed is noticeable distortion of central vision. If you are not aware of any visual problems surgery is not indicated. However, if the problem affects your ability to carry out every day tasks surgery should be considered.

Will it get worse if I leave it?

Not necessarily – generally you should only have surgery if you find the distortion of your vision troublesome.

How is the membrane removed?

This involves making 3 small keyholes in the eye and removing the jelly from inside (vitrectomy). The surgeon then uses fine forceps, under high magnification, to grasp and peel away the membrane from the retina.

Immediately after surgery the vision may actually be worse for a number of weeks, but the vision then gradually improves in about 3 out of 4 patients over a period of 3 – 6 months. However, due to damage caused by the membrane, some patients' vision may not improve following surgery.

In about 1 in 10 patients the membrane may occur again.

What are the common side effects of surgery?

Because the retina is a very delicate structure, this operation can cause tears to form in it. If this happens the retina may fall away from its normal position at the back of the eye (retinal detachment). This is a serious condition which, if left untreated, can cause loss of sight. Retinal detachment occurs in 1 in 30 patients having this operation, and then a further operation is needed to prevent sight loss. Sometimes the surgeon can see this problem starting during the operation and will put a bubble of gas in the eye during the operation. If this happens you may have to ‘posture’ (that is position your head) in a certain position after the operation for 7 days. The gas bubble will obscure your sight for about 2 weeks.

Everyone gets cataracts (when the lens in the eye gets cloudy) as they get older but this happens more quickly after vitrectomy and there is a high chance that cataract surgery will be necessary within 2 years.

Useful Contacts

**Somerset Association for the Blind**
01823 333818

**Royal National Institute for the Blind**
02073881266

**The Macular Disease Society**
01264 350551
Epiretinal Membrane or Macular Pucker