

What is a Retinal Artery Occlusion (RAO)?

A **retinal artery occlusion** occurs when the central retinal artery or one of the other arteries that branch off of it becomes blocked. This blockage is typically caused by a tiny cholesterol plaque or clot on the blood stream. The occlusion decreases the oxygen and nutrient supply to an area of the retina and can cause permanent vision loss.

Who is at risk for a Retinal Artery Occlusion?

Those with high cholesterol, heart disease, arteriosclerosis, hypertension, diabetes, and glaucoma are more at risk for retinal artery occlusions. Smoking can also increase one's risk for retinal vascular problems.

Signs and Symptoms of RAO

- Transient loss of vision prior to the artery occlusion (in some cases)
- Sudden, painless, complete, or partial loss of vision in one eye

Treatment Options

Unfortunately, there is no treatment that can consistently restore vision lost from an artery occlusion. However, if it is caught within the first 6 hours and treatment is initiated immediately, recovery is possible in rare cases. More importantly is the prevention of future complications. Current recommendations from the American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO) is to refer the patient ASAP to an ER to rule out risk for a stroke in the brain. Most patients are recommended to follow up with their cardiologist and/or PCP to have further evaluation. This may include further testing such as a carotid doppler and EKG.