

Epiretinal Membrane

The retina is a layer of light-sensing cells lining the back of your eye. As light rays enter your eye, the retina converts the rays into signals that are sent through the optic nerve to your brain, where they are recognized as images.

The **macula** is the small area at the center of your retina that allows you to see fine details. The macula normally lies flat against the back of the eye, like film lining the back of a camera. As you age, the clear, gel-like substance that fills the middle of your eye begins to shrink and pull away from the retina. In some cases, a thin “scar tissue” or membrane can grow on the surface of the macula. When wrinkles, creases, or bulges form on the macula due to this scar tissue, this is known as an **epiretinal membrane** or **macular pucker**. Damage to your macula causes blurred central vision, making it difficult to perform tasks such as reading small print or threading a needle. Peripheral (side) vision is not affected.

Symptoms, which can be mild or severe and affect one or both eyes, may include:

- blurred detail vision;
- distorted or wavy vision;
- gray or cloudy area in central vision; and
- blind spot in central vision.

Your ophthalmologist (Eye M.D.) detects an epiretinal membrane by examination and special photographic techniques. If your symptoms are mild, no treatment may be necessary. Updating your eyeglass prescription or wearing bifocals may improve your vision sufficiently. If you have more severe symptoms that interfere with your daily routine, your ophthalmologist may recommend **vitrectomy surgery** to peel and remove the abnormal scar tissue. During this outpatient procedure, your ophthalmologist uses tiny instruments to remove the wrinkled tissue. Vision often improves.

Be sure to discuss your options with your ophthalmologist. If surgery is recommended, you should be aware that as with any surgical procedure, rare complications can occur, including infection, bleeding, retinal detachment, recurrence of the epiretinal membrane, and earlier onset of cataract.