

# **Do you have difficulty in night vision?** **(Retinitis Pigmentosa)**

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Are you or anyone around you having difficulty in night vision? Or do you bump into chairs and other objects often due to inability to see these objects?

Beware!!! You may be suffering from what is known as Retinitis Pigmentosa!

Retinitis Pigmentosa is a group of inherited diseases that damage the retina (which is the innermost part of eye and acts like the film of a camera)

## **Signs And Symptoms**

Patients with retinitis pigmentosa (RP) may present with varying symptoms. The onset is often gradual and insidious, and many patients fail to recognize the manifestations of this condition until it has progressed significantly. When patients do report symptoms, they commonly include difficulty with night vision (nyctalopia) as well as loss of peripheral vision. Most common symptoms include:

1. Difficulty in vision in dim light
2. Tendency to trip easily or bump into objects when in poor lighting
3. Progressive, gradual loss of peripheral vision
4. Glare
5. Loss of contrast sensitivity

The course of disease varies. It may range from mild visual loss to blindness. Central visual acuity is generally not affected until the very late stages of RP, although variants have been encountered that cause extensive visual loss in early stages. Fortunately, most cases of retinitis pigmentosa take a long time to develop and visual loss is gradual.

## **Cause**

Retinitis pigmentosa is believed to be a genetic disorder. There are many forms of retinitis pigmentosa, and while most present with similar findings and outcome, some presentations are atypical.

## **Diagnosis And Detection**

Retinitis Pigmentosa is usually diagnosed before adulthood. It is often discovered when patient complains of difficulty in night vision. The ophthalmologist diagnoses RP by examining the retina with an ophthalmoscope.

### **Management:**

Since there is no known treatment for retinitis pigmentosa, management calls for prompt diagnosis and subsequent counseling to maintain quality of life. Occupational guidance is very important for these patients. If diagnosed early they should select a job according to their visual capacity and avoid night jobs.

As this is a hereditary disorder it is essential to carry out a pedigree analysis of these patients. This is critical to determine the exact inheritance pattern of the patient's condition. Individuals should know the risk for their progeny or other family members developing the disease. If any member of a family is diagnosed having retinitis pigmentosa, it is imperative that a thorough ophthalmic examination of all the family members, especially siblings and children be carried out.

Genetic counseling is recommended to help these patients deal with these issues.

Also, there are many new low vision aids, including telescopic and magnifying lenses, which may help the patients maximize their remaining vision. Field-expansion devices, infrared blocking sun lenses and contrast enhancing filters may be helpful.

### **Pearls**

- Most patients with RP are diagnosed in the second or third generation of life. Because of the insidious nature of the disorder, the earliest indicators are often objective findings rather than subjective complaints. Some presentations are extremely subtle, particularly in the early stages. A critical evaluation on all patients presenting with complaints of nyctalopia or peripheral field loss is recommended. .
  - Understandably, the untreatable progressive nature of retinitis pigmentosa is extremely unsettling for the patient and their loved ones; it is often beneficial to recommend psychological or family counseling early in the disease.
  - Although these patients cannot be cured, they still require periodic examination to assess their status as well as manage their ongoing refractive needs. Visual enhancement through low-vision devices can be tried.
  - Last but not the least, a thorough examination of all the family members is strongly recommended.
  - These days certain claims are being made about treatment of Retinitis Pigmentosa with Acupuncture/ Ayurveda / Russian treatment etc. Because of no other available treatment patients can easily fall prey to such claims. However, scientific basis for such claims are yet to be proven
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