

Diagnostic Tests

The Retinal Examination

When visiting with a retina specialist, he or she will use instruments and special lenses designed to directly visualize the retina. Direct retinal examination is perhaps the most important part of the evaluation process. The tools used by retina specialists are also used by primary eye doctors. Usually, patients are already familiar with these instruments.

Most of the time, eye drops will be used to dilate your pupils at the time of the retinal examination. Dilating the pupils allows the doctor to examine both the central and peripheral retina more completely. After the examination, the pupils may remain dilated for several hours. Most people are able to drive home after receiving dilating drops. However, we recommend bringing a friend or family member to drive home if you have never been dilated before or if you have had blurred vision in the past after receiving dilating drops.

The slit lamp and the indirect ophthalmoscope are two instruments that retina specialists use to examine the retina. With special lenses and relatively bright lights, the retina itself can be visualized directly. Although the lights used during the retinal examination can be uncomfortable for patients, they are not harmful to the eye. If abnormalities are detected during the retinal examination, additional diagnostic testing may be necessary for a more detailed or specific evaluation.

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Slit-lamp examination:

The slit-lamp microscope is a tool used to examine the retina. With the patient seated upright, a bright light is used to illuminate the inside of the eye. With the assistance of a magnifying lens, the eye doctor uses a slit-lamp to see the macula and optic nerve in great detail.

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Indirect examination:

The indirect ophthalmoscope is another magnifying tool used to examine the peripheral retina.

The patient is usually examined sitting upright or lying back. The doctor wears a headpiece containing special mirrors, lenses, and a light source. Combined with a handheld lens, the doctor is able to examine different parts of the peripheral retina in detail.

Sometimes, the indirect examination is combined with a maneuver called scleral indentation, where gentle pressure is placed on the eyelids to examine the most peripheral parts of the retina.

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