Retinopathy of Prematurity: Information for Parents

Retinopathy of prematurity (ROP) is an eye disease found in some premature babies. When a baby is born early, the blood vessels in the retina (the inner lining of the back of the eye) may not be fully developed. After birth, the blood vessels begin to grow abnormally. This is called ROP. Researchers do not know all of the reasons why ROP happens, but premature birth and exposure to high amounts of oxygen are two risk factors. Many times, this is a balancing act because sick babies may die without oxygen. It is very difficult to tightly control oxygen levels in sick babies.

Although most babies with ROP will heal over time, in some babies, the blood vessels continue to grow abnormally. This can cause the retina to separate from the back of the eye. Severe ROP can lead to loss of vision and even blindness.

ROP can be treated with a laser or medicine injected into the eye. Both treatments can slow down or even reverse the abnormal growth of the blood vessels in the eye.

While in the hospital, an eye doctor will check your baby’s eyes on a regular basis until the retina is fully developed. When your baby goes home, you will have an appointment with an outside eye doctor for your baby.

Please be sure you know the time and location of this appointment.



Because ROP is a serious disease that can get worse very quickly, you should not change or reschedule this appointment unless it is absolutely necessary. Waiting too long for ROP check-ups and treatment can lead to blindness for your baby. An eye doctor (called an ophthalmologist) must do the exam, because ROP can only be seen using special equipment. Your baby’s eyes may look normal to you even when there is severe ROP.

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