

Information for Patients

Amaurosis Fugax

Your doctor thinks that you might have had an episode of amaurosis fugax.

What is amaurosis fugax?

The term amaurosis fugax means 'transient darkening' and it is used by doctors to describe a temporary loss of vision through one eye, which returns to normal afterwards. This is usually due to a temporary disturbance of the blood flow to the back of the eye.

What causes amaurosis fugax?

The most common reason for a disturbance of the blood flow to the eye is a small blood clot or a suspected cholesterol plaque, which has broken off from a diseased blood vessel and has passed through the circulation at the back of the eye. These clots most often come from the major blood vessels of the neck and sometimes the heart. They are similar to clots that are responsible for 'mini strokes' and 'strokes'.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of amaurosis fugax usually come on suddenly and typically the visual disturbance is like a 'shutter' coming down or across your vision. This usually only lasts for a few seconds and your vision then gradually returns to normal over several minutes.

What can the doctor see when they examine my eyes?

Occasionally the doctor might be able to see a clot in the blood vessel at the back of your eye. However, usually your eye will look completely normal.

What tests will I need?

A number of factors make clots more likely to occur. These include high blood pressure, high cholesterol, raised blood sugar, and inflammation of the blood vessels or an irregular heart rate. It is important for us to identify whether you have these risk factors. You will have your blood pressure checked and blood samples taken for cholesterol and blood sugar (glucose) and a tracing of your heart (ECG) will be arranged.

As clots most often come from the blood vessels in your neck, the doctor will arrange for you to attend for a 'carotid doppler' (ultrasound scan of the blood vessels in your neck) to check for narrowing.

In younger patients, clots can form due to more unusual reasons such as an increased tendency for the blood to clot. These patients might require more extensive blood tests, and the doctor could arrange for an echocardiogram (ultrasound scan of the heart).

What is the treatment?

Treatment depends on the severity of the blockage, but is aimed at reducing the risk of further episodes of amaurosis fugax, and other clot related complications such as 'strokes' and 'mini strokes'. Whilst we await your test results, you will be advised to begin taking aspirin (or a similar medication) to help prevent further clots from forming. Additionally, a cholesterol lowering medication will also be started. Further treatment will depend on your test results, and will be discussed with you when you attend the neurovascular clinic.

What can I do to prevent further episodes?

- Smoking is known to increase the risk of clot formation; therefore if you are a smoker we strongly advise you to visit your GP to discuss stopping smoking.
- Alcohol consumption is also known to increase the risk of clot formation and maintaining safe levels of alcohol intake (fewer than twenty one units a week for men and fourteen units a week for women) will help to reduce the risk. Do not drink more than the recommended amount per week.

- Take regular exercise; recommended thirty minutes a day if you are not overweight and sixty - ninety minutes a day if you are overweight.
- Maintain a healthy weight and eat a healthy low fat, balanced diet.
- If you have high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, or heart disease make sure you follow your doctor's recommendations for treatment.

Will I be followed up at the hospital?

Yes. You will be referred to a Transient Ischaemic Attack (TIA) clinic, and an appointment will be sent to you.

Are there any complications?

Amaurosis fugax does not normally result in any permanent disability; however, it is a sign of atherosclerotic disease and means you are at an increased risk of having a stroke. Should you experience a further episode of visual loss, you must attend the Emergency Eye Department or your nearest casualty without delay.

Because each patient is different the information contained in this leaflet is a general guide only. Should you require any further information please contact the Emergency Eye Department on (0161) 276 5597 every day from 8.00am - 9.00pm including public holidays.

If you would like further information on the prevention of stroke, please contact the stroke helpline on 0303 3033 100.