

The Quick Summary

You are okay for now, but a blocked vein in your eye means that we have to keep checking for problems.

Retinal Vein Occlusion

Dr. Shalwala has determined that you had a blocked vein (an “occluded vein”) in your eye. The vein most likely isn’t blocked anymore, but a blocked vein can have some consequences.

Why did the vein get blocked? Usually the vein gets blocked because it is pinched off by the artery that travels with it. Arteries get blocked from a buildup of cholesterol and damage to the blood vessel walls that can happen with high blood pressure, diabetes, or smoking.

What can happen now? Once a vein in the eye gets blocked, there are two major consequences that can affect vision. These can happen at any time, but they usually happen in the first few months after the vein blockage is detected. That is why we monitor very closely in the first few months after a vein blockage and then space things out unless we detect a problem.

1. Macular edema - When a vein in the eye gets blocked, it can result in long-term altered fluid flow in the retina. This can lead to swelling (or “edema”) of the retina, the center of which is called the macula. Since the retina is like the “film” in the “camera of the eye,” a swollen retina is not a nice flat “film” for images to focus. This means that the vision will be blurry. Treatment of macular edema can involve injections and lasers.



2. Neovascularization - When a vein in the eye gets blocked, it can lead to an overall backup of blood flow that can permanently damage the blood vessels. If that happens, the delivery of oxygen to the retina is compromised, and the retina starts “calling out” for new blood vessels to deliver oxygen. The problem is that new blood vessels can distort the architecture of the retina, which can ruin retinal function. The new blood vessels can also bleed into the eye and fill the eyeball with blood, which cannot be seen through. Treatment of neovascularization can involve injections but almost always needs a laser for permanent treatment.

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