

Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals **NHS**

NHS Trust

Oxford Eye Hospital

Recovering after Vitrectomy

– some thoughts from our past patients



Some of our previous patients have given us their thoughts on recovery after a vitrectomy. We have added comments of our own (in bold type) below some of the quotes. We hope this information will help you and make your recovery a little easier.

How to survive a Vitrectomy: A patient's perspective

"I had my operation in January 1999. Whilst anticipating with delight the likely benefits of the procedure, it wasn't the jolliest start to the New Year. When I came round, lying face-down on the hard bed hospitality of Doyne Ward, I did a lot of teeth gritting and tried to bear in mind the excellent advice I had been given beforehand about "put your life on hold for a fortnight". I thought that a fortnight would pass whether I had the operation or not and what bliss it would be not to see holes in the middle of words or curvy lines where there should be straight ones."

Patients having vitreo-retinal surgery for a macular hole will need to posture face down for 14 days; for other conditions this is only necessary for 5 days.

"My main hobby is reading and the ensuing period of book deprivation was horrible."

Some patients find that it is possible to read / watch TV by positioning in such a way that the TV or book can be viewed with the other eye.

“I wouldn’t let anyone visit because I looked as though I had gone two rounds with Mike Tyson.”

Because of the ‘face down’ position, the eye can become swollen within a few days of surgery. The force of gravity on the delicate skin around the eye can increase the swelling even once you have been discharged from hospital. The redness of the eye can take two or more weeks to start to clear.

“What frightened me more than anything was not being able to see anything at all out of the eye. ‘Suppose’, I conjectured in sad moments, ‘my eye has been stirred up with instruments and I have lost all vision forever!’ Each day I closed the good eye and held up my hand in front of the operated one and was terrified at the result. I telephoned the ward several times and was always comforted by its calm and professional acceptance of all my fears. Then, one day, I did my eye-closing act and couldn’t believe that there was a rim of vision appearing. This improvement continued until I got to the stage of a large black circle with two small black circles at the top edges. This gave the effect of gazing at Mickey Mouse’s head inside your eye – quite fun at first, but you soon get fed up with it.”

The return of sight depends entirely on the initial cause of sight loss. This surgery can be undertaken to preserve or restore sight – which can vary from a very little to near normal sight. The likely outcome of surgery is discussed with every patient on an individual basis before the

operation. However, it is worth noting that any improvement in sight will not be appreciated for several weeks and even up to a month or more after the surgery.

“This note is really about how to handle your life during the ‘posturing’ period. ‘Posturing’ struck me as an extraordinary term, reminiscent of Prince Charming striding about the stage in a pantomime and doffing his hat with sweeping gestures! It is as well though to bear in mind that only a few years ago there would have been no surgical procedure to help you. This is what we did:

1. It is difficult to cook and therefore wise to buy in a stock of instant dinners.
2. It is miserable having a very flat or no pillow while your husband appears to be on Mont Blanc.
3. I took a walk – yes, still bent in half – around the garden twice a day.
4. Stand under a hot shower or soak your back in a warm bath to relieve neck tension during the break periods.
5. The boredom factor is very high. I had amassed a collection of recorded books on tape and these were invaluable. I listened to the radio a great deal. I didn’t lose touch with ‘Coronation Street’. The characters’ voices didn’t need their visual image. I listened to my husband reading from the daily paper. The telephone bill rose sharply. You really need to make a framework

for the day – a timetable, if you like; otherwise the hours stretch ahead seemingly interminably. Breaking the day into sections really does help.

But, there comes a day when your surgeon says that no more posturing is necessary and you gaze at the passing scenery on the way home from Oxford like Dorothy in Oz, all full of wonderment.

I forgot to say that it is a good idea to have a variety of places to be bent in half. I used the desk, the kitchen table, the dining-room table, lying face down on the settee and a beach lounger.

Get the posturing and blind-in-one-eye time over and you have all the delight of telling people about this most unusual operation. Eventually, you will get your new spectacles and once again resume your proper life, while being very thankful for the skill that brought this about.”

How to contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about your eye, please telephone us and ask to speak to one of the nurses:

Tel: Oxford **(01865) 231117**

If you need an interpreter or need a document in another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221473**.

When we receive your call we may transfer you to an interpreter. This can take some time, so please be patient.

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