

# Solar Retinopathy

## What is Solar Retinopathy?

The name given to eye damage which has been caused by looking directly at the sun is solar retinopathy. The eclipse of the sun on the 11 of August 1999 put the whole of the country at risk of eye damage due to the temptation for people to stare at the sun.

Your eye has an opening at the front (pupil) and a lens which adjusts to focus images you are looking at onto the retina at the back of the eye. The retina is made up of delicate tissue that is sensitive to light. Solar retinopathy occurs when the harmful radiation from the sun reaches the eye and is concentrated by the lens onto the retina. This burns the retina and destroys the cells that enable you to see.

## How do I know if I have solar retinopathy?

As there are no pain-sensing nerves in the retina you will not feel any pain while the damage is being caused. Some hours after the event you may experience the following symptoms:

- eyes may become watery and sore
- difficulty in seeing shape and detail of objects
- discomfort with bright light
- a blind spot in your central vision
- things may appear to be unusually coloured
- objects may be distorted in shape

## What do I do now?

In the first instance, go to your local optometrist, the eye specialist found in the high street optician's shop. Unfortunately, there are no treatments currently available, however the optometrist will be able to advise you on the extent of your particular eye damage and assess and monitor your condition. The optometrist can also refer you on to other specialists if necessary. Alternatively, visit your GP or the local Accident & Emergency Department.

## Is the damage permanent?

The Eyecare Trust is a registered charity that exists to promote awareness of all aspects of eye health. For more information call our public information line on 0845 129 5001 or log on to [www.eyecaretrust.org.uk](http://www.eyecaretrust.org.uk)



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If the damage is mild, your eyesight may return to normal after a time when the swelling at the back of the eye is reduced. The length of time varies with each individual and the extent of the damage. The eye specialist will advise you on how to reduce the discomfort while the swelling goes down.

Unfortunately, if the damage is more severe, your eyesight may be permanently affected. It is only through monitoring of your sight over a period of weeks that the eye specialist will be able to assess the extent of the long-term damage.

### **What if my sight cannot be fully restored?**

If your sight has been permanently affected, much can be done to help you adjust and use your remaining vision as fully as possible. Services on offer vary in different areas and you should ask your eye specialist to discuss the available options with you. You should also contact your local social services department, whose address and telephone number can be found at your Town Hall, local library or through Directory Enquiries.

# Factsheet

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