

Cryotherapy

This material will help you understand your cryotherapy (freezing) treatment and what you can expect.

What is cryotherapy?

Cryotherapy is a freeze treatment used to treat a number of eye problems, especially retina conditions. Cryotherapy is commonly used to repair tears or detachments of the retina. It can also be used to seal leaking blood vessels and helps to slow or stop the growth of abnormal blood vessels (called neovascularization). These are problems commonly caused by diabetic retinopathy and macular degeneration.

What do I need to know before my cryotherapy treatment?

There are no special preparations for this procedure. You should eat normally and take all your regular medicines before you come in for surgery.

The procedure is performed as an outpatient surgery or in your doctor's office, so you will be able to go home the same day. Be sure to arrange for a responsible adult to come with you, stay during surgery, and take you home. Your eyes will be blurry after the surgery, so you should not drive.

What should I expect on the day of my cryotherapy treatment?

On the day of your procedure, you will come to the Kellogg Eye Center Retina Clinic. A technician will first take a few measurements of your eyes. Next s/he will instill eye drops to numb your eye and prepare you for the treatment. Local anesthesia may also be used to further numb the eye.

After your eye is numb, your eye doctor will apply a freezing probe to the outer surface of the eye. S/he will then administer several bursts of very cold gases (usually nitrous oxide), which works to fix the problem area. You will remain awake and comfortable during the procedure. Most patients experience some pressure on your eye from where the probe is during the freeze application. Less common are feelings of cold and/or slight pain during the procedure (similar to a “brain freeze” or “ice-cream headache”). The entire process takes about 30 minutes to complete.

What should I expect after my cryotherapy treatment?

Your vision may be blurry after the procedure, but should clear within a few days. The treated eye is also usually red and swollen afterwards. Applying a cold compress to the eyelid may help relieve some of your discomfort. Your doctor may also prescribe an eye drop to further reduce redness and irritation. You should avoid vigorous exercise such as jogging and limit excess activity following the procedure to allow for proper healing. Healing typically takes 10-14 days.

Are there any complications related to cryotherapy treatment?

With any surgery, there is a chance of a complication. Your doctor will discuss many of these with you when s/he talks with you about consenting to surgery. You should call your eye doctor right away if you have any of these symptoms (or any others that worry you):

- Increased pain not helped by Tylenol® (Acetaminophen)
- Change in vision
- Any redness or swelling around the eye gets progressively worse

If you call the clinic after clinic hours, you will be told how to get in touch with the eye doctor on call. There is an eye doctor on call every day of the year.

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