

Posturing and Gas Bubble Information

Introduction

During your Pars Plan Vitrectomy operation it was necessary to insert a gas bubble into your eye due to a retinal hole or tear in the retina or another retinal condition. It is important for you to follow the posturing information in this leaflet.

What is posturing?

Posturing is a term to describe the head position that you need to adopt after your operation.

Why must I posture?

Posturing is an important part of your aftercare because a bubble of gas, air or silicone oil was injected into your eye during surgery to help keep your retina flat. By holding your head in a certain position the bubble will float towards the problem area of your eye and support the retina from the inside of your eye (like a bandage) and help healing.

How do I posture?

There are a number of positions that may be used depending on where the problem area is in your eye. This will be indicated by a picture and verbal/written information which will be discussed and demonstrated to you before you go home. Posturing using pillows will help to maintain your position.

How long must I posture for?

Posturing is an extremely important part of your treatment. To have the best possible outcome, your posturing instructions need to be followed closely. Posturing is normally between 3-7 days. A 10-15 minute break from posturing is allowed every hour. It is important you maintain your head in the correct position but you can move about altering your position from sitting to lying (if this is more comfortable) because you may find your neck or shoulder muscles will ache. In your allocated break from posturing take short walks which will aid circulation and relieve pressure. You will probably find it easier to eat and drink in the allocated break from posturing depending on the adopted head position.

While posturing, your mobility/normal activity will be restricted. It may be advisable to eat a light diet with plenty of drinks to prevent constipation. While the bubble is present in your eye never lie on your back or have your head tilted backwards for longer than it takes to put your eye drops in.

What happens to the gas bubble in my eye?

The eye will eventually absorb the bubble and be replaced by natural fluids produced by the eye so you will see it becoming smaller and smaller as time goes on. Initially your vision will be worse than before surgery because the gas bubble is present.

Some points to remember about the gas bubble

- initially the bubble is large enough to make your vision worse because the gas makes everything out of focus. This will last up to 2-3 weeks
- as the bubble reduces in size it will appear as a fluid level (like a spirit level). You will be able to see above this line. This is where the gas meets the fluid which gradually replaces the gas bubble. The line will move in your vision with head movements and over time you will see more
- the bubble will disappear between 2 and 12 weeks by itself depending on the type of medical gas used, eventually breaking up into smaller bubbles and disappearing completely from vision
- as long as there is gas in your eye you must not fly in a plane because changes in air pressure will cause the bubble to expand resulting in pain and can lead to loss of sight
- to a lesser extent the same thing can happen with changes in atmospheric pressure – so no bungee jumping or scuba diving
- if you need to have a general anaesthetic please tell the anaesthetist you have a gas bubble in order to avoid use of nitrous oxide which can cause a dangerous rise in eye pressure

Frequently Asked Questions

(please find more FAQ in the Vitrectomy and aftercare Leaflet)

I live on my own how am I going to cope?

We recommend you arrange for someone to help at home for at least a week while you are posturing. Ask your family or friends to help for two weeks especially with the shopping. Before your admission to hospital stock up with ready meals to heat in the oven or microwave.

How do I wash my face?

You can apply a shield and wash your face with a flannel and shave. If your eye needs bathing use cooled boiled water. Gently clean your eye by using some cotton wool while keeping your eye closed. Do not press down on the eyeball. Wipe gently from the nose outwards and discard the cotton wool after each wipe. Repeat until the lids appear clean. Avoid rubbing your eye and avoid smoky or dusty environments.

When can I go back to work?

You will not be able to return to work while you are still posturing. It also depends on what you do and if the gas bubble is disturbing your vision which may interfere with your work. Usually work can be resumed within a month but heavy manual work may require a longer convalescence period. We can discuss this with when you attend for your follow-up appointment.

When can I drive?

You should not drive until after your doctor at the hospital advises you it is safe to do so.

Can I travel?

You must not fly until we have checked that all the gas has gone. After you have stopped posturing then you can travel in a car, bus or train etc.

I enjoy walking, jogging, swimming and going to the gym when can I start again?

When you are posturing you will have free time to go for a short walk. Gentle jogging or light weights at the gym/exercise classes can possibly be resumed four weeks following the operation but contact sports, eg: rugby or heading a football should be avoided for longer. Swimming may be resumed once you have stopped using the drops and your eyes feel comfortable with no irritation but it is best to check with us first.

Will I damage my eye if I move my head quickly, sneeze hard, cough or bend down to lift something?

You must not strain to lift anything very heavy for at least two months. Sneezing and coughing and moving quickly will not damage your eye.