



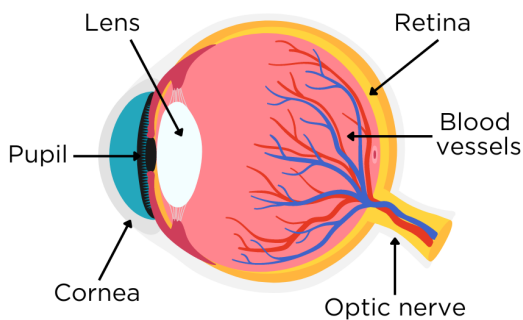
# Retinopathy of Prematurity

**Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP) is an eye problem that affects some premature babies. When ROP develops, it is usually mild and goes away on its own without causing any vision problems.**

## What is ROP?

ROP is an eye problem that affects the retina. The retina is the tissue at the back of the eye that senses light. It sends signals to the brain so we can see.

In some premature babies, the blood vessels in the retina don't develop properly and grow the wrong way. This is known as Retinopathy of Prematurity, or ROP.



## Why do premature babies get ROP?

We don't know why some babies develop ROP and others don't. But we do know that babies who are sicker and smaller are more likely to develop it.

## How can you tell if your baby has ROP?

When your baby is in the hospital, specialist nurses will check their eyes and take photos with a special digital camera called a Retcam™.

An eye specialist (ophthalmologist) will look at these pictures to see if your baby has developed ROP and decide if further testing is needed.

## What happens during the ROP examination?

About an hour before taking the images, we'll put eye drops in your baby's eyes. These drops make your baby's pupil (the black spot in the middle of the eye) bigger. This helps us see the retina clearly so we can check for ROP.

To keep your baby's eyelids open, we need to use a tool called an eye retractor. Although it will be a bit uncomfortable for your baby, it allows us to get the best images and finish the examination quickly.

We'll put a gel on your baby's eye and then take pictures of the retina.

## Will your baby be in pain?

Your baby will be uncomfortable while their eyes are being checked, but we'll do as much as possible to reduce their distress.

We'll do this by:

- using local anaesthetic eye drops before we start
- swaddling your baby
- giving them sucrose. For more information see the fact sheet 'Sucrose for pain relief in newborn babies'.

## How long does it take?

The examination usually takes about 5 minutes. Let your bedside nurse know if you want to be there when your baby is examined so we can make arrangements.

## When will your baby be examined?

We'll check your baby's eyes for ROP if they were born weighing less than 1250 grams or before 30 weeks. We'll keep examining them every 2 weeks, even if there are no signs of ROP. If we see significant signs of ROP, we'll examine your baby every week until it goes away. Examinations for ROP will stop when the blood vessels in the retina are fully developed. This is usually at about 40 weeks, or when your baby was due to be born.

## What happens after the examination?

The ophthalmologist will review the images. If they think it's necessary, they'll examine your baby's eyes again using a tool called an ophthalmoscope. The results of all eye examinations will be recorded in your baby's health records.

## What happens if your baby has ROP?

In most cases, ROP is mild and goes away by itself, without causing any vision problems. In severe cases, the medical team or ophthalmologist will talk with you about treatment options for your baby, such as laser treatment or injections to slow the abnormal growth of blood vessels.

## Who can you talk to about ROP?

You can speak with the nurses, doctors and ROP nurses looking after your baby. If they can't answer your questions, they'll arrange a time for you to talk with the ophthalmologist.

## Will your baby need eye checks after leaving the hospital?

Your baby may need to come back for ROP examinations at the outpatient clinic if their retina hasn't fully developed before leaving the hospital. We'll let you know if this is necessary before you leave the hospital, and we will contact you with more information.

If your baby goes home from another hospital's Special Care Nursery, they'll arrange a follow-up examination in your local area if possible. This examination checks for any eye problems other than ROP that might need treatment, like needing glasses for better vision.

We recommend that your baby sees an ophthalmologist for an eye examination when they turn one year old.

All babies who had ROP screening while in hospital will be offered an eye examination at the Melbourne Children's Eye Clinic when they turn one. The clinic is at the Royal Children's Hospital.

## For more information

### Safer Care Victoria (ROP)

Retinopathy of prematurity (ROP): Clinical guidance - [safercare.vic.gov.au](https://safercare.vic.gov.au)

### The Royal Children Hospital

What is ROP?

[rch.org.au/ophthal/patient\\_information/What\\_is\\_ROP](https://rch.org.au/ophthal/patient_information/What_is_ROP)

### The Royal Women's Hospital, Newborn Intensive Care Unit

20 Flemington Rd, Parkville VIC 3052

T: (03) 8345 3400

## Family Violence Support

### 1800 Respect National Helpline

You can get help if you have experienced sexual assault, domestic or family violence and abuse.

You can call any time of day or night.

1800 737 732 [1800respect.org.au](https://1800respect.org.au)

## Do you need an interpreter?



You can ask for an interpreter if you need one.

**Disclaimer:** This fact sheet provides general information only. For specific advice about your or your baby's healthcare needs, you should seek advice from your health professional. The Royal Women's Hospital does not accept any responsibility for loss or damage arising from your reliance on this fact sheet instead of seeing a health professional. If you or your baby require urgent medical attention, please contact your nearest emergency department.  
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