

When seeing an eye doctor, it is sometimes necessary to examine the retina. In occasional cases, the doctor may be able to look through the pupil and examine the retina and the optic nerve if your pupil is naturally large. However in most cases and especially if the doctor needs to see your peripheral retina (at the back of your eye), eye drops may need to be put in to dilate the pupil.

Looking through the pupil is like looking through a keyhole. If the keyhole is small it will be difficult to see whats on the other side. If the keyhole is large, it will be easier to see and it will be possible to see more on the other side. If the pupil is large, it becomes easier to see the retina and also more of the retina can be seen by the doctor.

Doctors will usually prescribe and then put in drops called 2.5% phenyl epinephrine and 1% tropicamide eye drops. Occasionally trained optometrists and nurses may also have qualifications to put in these eye drops. The drops can sting for 1-2 minutes but afterwards the eye becomes comfortable.

After 10 to 15 minutes, the pupil usually dilates. The duration it takes to dilate can be very variable with some people having a dilated pupil in 5 minutes and in some other people it can take as long as 30-40 minutes.

People usually feel that the near vision becomes blurred after the pupil dilates. The effect can be variable and some people feel distance vision is blurred as well.

After the doctor has examined the eye you can go home. Do not drive until you feel that your vision is good enough. It's usually a good idea for someone else to drive and take you home.

The pupil will usually take 3-6 hours to come back to its proper size and reactive state. Again the duration can be variable depending upon the individual. Some people will have minimal problems and the vision will return to normal within an hour or two. In others, visual blurring may persist for 5-6 hours. It is unusual for visual blurring to persist for more than 6 hours.



Very few people (less than 1%) may develop significantly raised pressure in the eye after pupil dilation. If this happens, patients may experience pain, redness and blurred vision. In this case, the doctor should be contacted immediately.

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