Amaurosis Fugax

Amaurosis fugax is a condition in which a person loses sight in one eye. The loss of vision in the affected eye may be total or partial. It usually lasts just a few seconds or minutes. Then, it returns to normal. Occasionally, it may last for several hours. This is caused by interruption of blood flow to the artery that supplies blood to the retina (*lining at the back of the eye, contains nerves needed for sight*). The temporary loss of blood flow causes symptoms similar to a stroke. The family of symptoms that happen from a loss of blood flow is called a Transient Ischemic Attack (TIA, *mini-stroke*). In the case of amaurosis fugax, the eye is the organ that is involved.

SYMPTOMS

- Painless, sudden loss of vision in one eye.
- Visual loss is often from the top down, appearing like a curtain being pulled down over the field of vision.
- Rapid return of vision. Vision generally comes back in a few minutes to several hours.

CAUSES

TIAs and amaurosis fugax are caused by a loss of blood flow. This can be due to a buildup of cholesterol and fats (*plaque*) in the arteries or the heart. If some of that plaque comes off the artery and gets into the bloodstream, it can flow to the artery that supplies blood to the retina, blocking the flow of blood to the retina. When that happens, vision is lost for as long as the blood flow is interrupted.

Factors that make it more likely you will have amaurosis fugax at some point include:

- Smoking.
- Poorly controlled diabetes.
- High blood pressure.
- High cholesterol levels.

Medical conditions that may increase the risk of an attack of amaurosis fugax include:

- Heart disease.
- Diseases of the heart valves.
- Certain diseases of the blood (sickle cell anemia, leukemia).
- Blood clotting (*coagulation*) disorders.
- Artery inflammation (temporal arteritis, giant cell arteritis).

Since amaurosis fugax is an “incomplete stroke,” in some people it can be a sign of an increased risk for an actual stroke. A stroke can result in permanent vision loss or loss of other body functions. As a result, caring for yourself after amaurosis fugax means taking many of the same steps you should take to prevent a stroke.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Only take over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort, or fever as directed by your caregiver.
- Take any medicines that are prescribed for control of your blood pressure and cholesterol levels.
- Keep diabetes under control as well as possible.
- Stop smoking.
- Follow diet instructions, if your caregiver has given them to you.
- Try to get at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity every day. If you have not been active, talk to your caregiver about how to get started.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You lose vision in one or both eyes again, even if only for a short period of time.

- You lose vision in one eye and it does not recover within a very brief time (less than 5-10 minutes). The sooner you see an eye specialist (*ophthalmologist*), the better the chance of regaining some vision, in the case of a central retinal artery occlusion (CRAO, *blockage of central retinal artery*). However, most cases of CRAO result in some degree of permanent visual loss, even with aggressive treatment.
- You have symptoms of a stroke:
  - Weakness in one side of your body.
  - Difficulty speaking or thinking clearly.
  - Lack of coordination.

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