

# **AMAUROSIS FUGAX [TRANSIENT MONOCULAR BLINDNESS]**

## **What is it?**

Amaurosis fugax is a short-lived episode of blindness in one eye (monocular). This symptom usually develops suddenly, and many individuals describe the event as "it was as if a shade or curtain came over my eye." It is caused by a blockage or low blood flow within the main blood vessel supplying the eye. Blockages are usually due to a blood clot or plaque (small piece of cholesterol) that breaks off from a larger artery and travels upward to the brain or eye, becoming lodged in the main artery supplying the eye. Low blood flow to the eye may also result from a critical narrowing of one of the main blood vessels supplying blood to the brain and eye. The monocular blindness of amaurosis fugax is generally brief, but in rare cases it may be prolonged or permanent.

## **Treatment**

The treatment of amaurosis fugax depends on identifying the source of the blood clots or cholesterol that have caused low blood flow or blocked the main artery to the eye. Blood clots may come from arteries inside the head, arteries in the neck, or from the heart. Several different tests may need to be done to find the source. These tests may include an ultrasound of the carotid arteries in the neck, a study of the electrical system of the heart, a magnetic resonance angiography (MRA) scan of the blood vessels in the head and neck, an echocardiogram of the heart, or an angiogram (dye imaging of the blood vessels). If these studies reveal the source of the problem, medication and/or surgery may be necessary.

## **The DOs**

- If you are a diabetic, maintain especially good control of your blood sugar.
- If you use tobacco, immediately begin a program to quit smoking. Ask your physician for help.

## **The DON'Ts**

- **DO NOT DRIVE** if you are having an episode or having a number. A sudden loss of vision in one eye could put you and others in danger.
- Don't use tobacco because it promotes vascular disease.
- Don't ignore any of the above signs or symptoms because they may be an early warning sign of a major stroke.

## **When to Call Your Doctor**

- If you have an unusually severe headache.
- If you have another episode of vision loss, call immediately.
- If you have signs or symptoms of a transient ischemic attack (TIA), call immediately your GP. The following are some of the more common symptoms of a TIA:
  - Weakness or numbness on one side of the face or body (face, arm, leg).
  - Changes in vision.
  - Confusion.
  - Dizziness.

- Blindness.
- Double vision.
- Slurred speech, inability to talk, or difficulty swallowing.
- Loss of coordination

From an ophthalmic point of view we often ask our Neurologist or your General Practitioner to review your general health.

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