

Post operative posturing following retinal surgery and insertion of a bubble of gas/oil

Information and advice for patients

Ophthalmology

What is posturing?

Posturing describes the position of your head and upper body that you need to adopt following your operation. It is the hardest part of recovery after the surgery but the most important.

Why is it necessary to adhere to the recommended posturing?

It is used after retinal surgery to ensure the gas or silicon oil bubble in the eye is positioned against the part of the retina that needs to be flattened. The bubble floats inside the eye's cavity and by keeping your head in the right position, the bubble helps the retina to reattach correctly.

How long do I need to be in the position for?

You should start posturing as soon as possible after the operation. Usually, you will need to posture for up to 10 days keeping your head in the right position for 45-50 minutes of every hour during the day. You can take a 10-minute break each hour for things like toileting, eating and gentle exercises to stay comfortable and keep good circulation. At night, you must keep the correct posture while you sleep, but you don't need to take 10-minute breaks. The important aspect is to get a good night's sleep.

Which activities can I be involved in during posturing?

If your other eye can see well, you can read, use your laptop or other devices and watch TV while keeping your head in the right position. Reading might feel uncomfortable for a few days, but it won't harm your eyes.

You can shower, shave or bath at home, but be careful not to get water in your eye or rub it during the first 2 weeks.

Which activities can I NOT be involved in during posturing?

Do not lie flat on your back until the gas is fully absorbed or the oil is removed.

Avoid contact sports during your recovery to prevent accidents to your operated eye.

Wait until you no longer need to posture and feel up to it before resuming normal household activities and sexual activities.

You should not fly or participate in activities above an altitude of 4,000 feet as the gas bubble could expand raising the eye pressure and potentially cause harm and pain.

You may however travel by plane if you have a silicone oil bubble, because it does not expand.

What happens to the gas/oil bubble afterwards?

The oil stays in your eye for a few months, up to about 6 months, until your retina has healed enough, then it is removed in a separate surgery. The air and gas, however, are absorbed by the body over 2-10 weeks, depending on the type of gas used. After the surgery, you will be informed which type of gas was used.

While the gas or oil is present in your eye, your vision is usually blurry. However, it gradually improves over time until it is eventually absorbed/removed. Here is how long it takes for each type of bubble to disappear.

Short acting gas (SF6): 2 weeks

Medium acting gas (C2F6): 4 weeks

Long-acting gas (C3F8): 2 months

Air bubbles will disappear within 10 days.

When the gas bubble is halfway gone, you will see a horizontal line across your vision, bobbing up and down when you move your head. This line is where the gas meets the fluid which is gradually replacing it. It is just like a spirit level. You will have sight above this line, and blackness below it. Day by day the line will move lower down; the seeing area will get bigger, and the black area will get smaller until it is just a circle at the bottom of your vision, and then it disappears.

Will the gas/oil cause problems?

Having gas/oil in your eye might lead to the formation of a cataract (cloudy lens), which means you may need further surgery in the future to remove.

What happens if you require any admission or surgery?

You must inform the anaesthetist if you have a general anaesthetic for any operation while there is still gas in your eye, as they cannot use nitrous oxide gas in your anaesthetic. It is crucial to inform any medical team dealing with you in any case of emergency.

Keep the yellow gas band on your wrist until the gas disappears. Then you can take it off yourself.

When can I drive?

You should not drive while the gas/oil bubble is present in your eye. You might not be able to drive for up to 6 months depending on the type of bubble used. It is best to check with your doctor before you start to drive again.

Tips to improve adherence of posturing

Whilst you are posturing, it is important to follow a light diet with plenty of drinks and fruit and vegetables to aid in digestion and avoid reflux. Because you would not be moving much, you might experience constipation and dehydration. If this happens, please contact your GP for treatment and advice. It is useful to keep your head down leaning forward and bending at the waist when eating to make swallowing easier.

You can use a posturing aid (called a face support) which can be rented/purchased online.

Arrange your pillow to support the rest of your body while maintaining the correct posture.

Wear loose comfortable clothing and avoid clothes with lots of buttons down the front, especially if you need to posture face down.

A warm bath or gentle massage can be useful in relieving muscle discomfort and neck stiffness.

What if something happens after my surgery before my next follow up appointment?

Please report to the eye casualty or contact us if you experience the following on your return home:

- Excessive pain in the operated eye
- Worsening or Loss of vision
- Increasing redness of the eye
- Discharge from the eye

Telephone: 0121 507 6780

Monday-Friday: 9am – 7pm

Saturday: 9am – 7pm

Sunday: 9am – 6pm

Outside these times, please contact your local A&E department.

The following diagrams are to help you achieve the required position.

The ward nurses will advise you on which position(s) you need to use and the duration per the post operative plan.

1. Sitting upright head tilted to right
2. Sitting upright
3. Sitting upright head tilted to left
4. Face down, right cheek to pillow
5. Face down
6. Face down left cheek to pillow
7. Left side
8. Right side

A picture showing the various types of positions



Sitting upright
head tilted
to right



Sitting upright



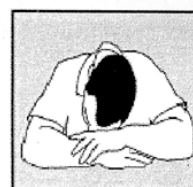
Sitting upright
head tilted
to left



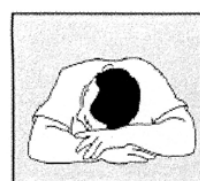
Face down
right cheek
to pillow



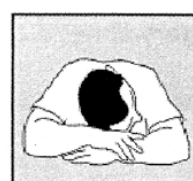
Face down



Face down
left cheek
to pillow



Left side



Right side

Contact Details

Department: Vitreo-Retina

Address: Birmingham Midland Eye Centre (BMEC)

Dudley Road

Birmingham

West Midlands

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Telephone: 0121 507 4440

Sources used for the information in this leaflet

Image sourced and used, with permission from South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust permission sought.

Further Information

The Foundation American Society of Retina Specialists (2024) Retina Health Fact Sheet. Available at: <https://www.asrs.org/patients/retinal-diseases> [Accessed 22 July 2024].

Moorfields Eye Hospital NHS Foundation Trust (2024) Patient information leaflet library. Available at: <https://www.moorfields.nhs.uk/for-health-professionals/leaflet-library> [Accessed 22 July 2024].

National health service (2024). Available at: <https://www.nhs.uk/> [Accessed 20 May 2024].

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