

What is Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP)

– Information for Parents

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Part 1 of 3 in a series

(<https://preventblindness.org/retinopathy-of-prematurity-rop>)

Read Next: “How is Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP) Diagnosed and Treated?”

What is retinopathy of prematurity (ROP)?

ROP happens more often in babies born early or small because the blood vessels of the retina do not completely form during pregnancy. The retina is a thin layer of cells in the back of the eye that acts like the film in the camera of the eye to help you see. With ROP, blood vessels in the eye grow abnormally and spread on the retina.

Important activities for your baby’s vision throughout childhood and adolescence:

- Eye exams while your baby is in the NICU
- Eye exams with specialists after your baby leaves the NICU
- Following all treatment recommendations

Retinopathy (ret-in-AH-puh-thee) of prematurity (ROP)

is an eye disease that occurs in some babies who:



Are born prematurely
(*earlier than 30 weeks of pregnancy*)



Have low birth weight (*less than 3 lb 5 oz or 1,500 g*)



Have complications after they are born and receive extra oxygen for more than a few days

What are the risk factors for ROP?

The earlier and smaller your baby is born, the more likely their chance of developing ROP that may need treatment. Other risk factors include:



Breathing problems at birth that require prolonged and high amounts of oxygen



Changing oxygen levels in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU)– from high to low and vice versa



Poor growth or weight gain after birth



Being a multiple at birth (twins, triplets, etc.)



Infections in your baby’s mother around the time of delivery



Infections in your baby after birth



Bleeding in the brain



High blood sugar

Questions to ask the doctor:

You are a big part of your child's care team. Here are some questions that might be helpful to ask when talking with the ophthalmologist:

- What is my child able to see?
- Will my child require medical treatment?
- Does the treatment have any complications?
- What are the chances that my child could go blind from ROP?
- How likely is it that my child's ROP will return after treatment?
- How frequently do I need to bring my child in for follow-up eye examinations?
- How will my child's vision be affected in the future?



“As the parent, you are the expert on your child, and you are your child's best advocate. Follow your instincts, ask questions, take notes, and know it is ok to feel uncertain.”

–Nicole, Parent of Child with ROP & Family and Professional Training Director, SPAN

This information developed in partnership with



Find more information on ROP, support for families of children in the NICU, and Early Intervention at:
<https://preventblindness.org/family-resources-retinopathy-of-prematurity-rop>



Scan the QR code with your smartphone's camera to learn more about ROP.