Retinoblastoma

What is Retinoblastoma?

Retinoblastoma is a fast growing childhood cancer of the eye, which develops in the cells of the retina. If it is left untreated it can spread through the optic nerve to the brain and may be fatal. However the tumour itself is very treatable and recovery rates are good.

The tumour can require complete removal of the eye (enucleation) and may need radiation therapy to prevent spread of the tumour.

How does it affect vision?

Retinoblastoma has symptoms such as the child having a squint, the pupil of the eye reflecting light white (instead of red), a decrease in visual acuity, a red and irritated eye or pain (although this is not common). Children with one fully functioning eye are not considered vision impaired.

Who is most at risk?

Retinoblastoma may either be genetic (caused by a problem with genetic material on a chromosome) or sporadic (not inherited).

How can it be treated?

If removal of the eye is necessary a plastic artificial eye (or ocular prosthesis) can be fitted within a few weeks. These can look very natural. The artificial eye looks like a cupped hand and the cupped side fits over a clump of eye muscles left in the socket so that the eye has some movement.

Insertion and removal of the eye for washing become very simple with practice and many young children learn to do it themselves. As the child grows it will be necessary to have the eye built up to fit the socket. The prosthesis helps the orbital bones to develop normally.

Adapted from What is Retinoblastoma by the Childhood Eye Cancer Trust

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