

HANDBOOK OF RETINAL DISEASE

A CASE-BASED APPROACH

SECOND EDITION



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Contents

Preface	v
Contributors	xiii
Section 1: Normal retina	
Chapter 1	Normal retina
	<i>Jordana G Fein, Alyse J Richard</i>
	3
Section 2: Retinal vascular disease	
Chapter 2	Diabetic retinopathy
	<i>Jordana G Fein, Alyse J Richard</i>
	11
Chapter 3	Venous occlusive disease
	<i>Jordana G Fein</i>
	18
Chapter 4	Arterial occlusive disease
	<i>Jordana G Fein</i>
	23
Chapter 5	Retinal arterial macroaneurysm
	<i>Jordana G Fein</i>
	28
Chapter 6	Roth spots
	<i>Alyse J Richard</i>
	32
Chapter 7	Cotton wool spots
	<i>Alyse J Richard</i>
	35
Chapter 8	Radiation retinopathy
	<i>Jordana G Fein</i>
	39
Chapter 9	Hypertensive retinopathy
	<i>Jordana G Fein</i>
	43
Chapter 10	Sickle cell retinopathy
	<i>Jordana G Fein</i>
	49
Chapter 11	Ocular ischemic syndrome
	<i>Jordana G Fein</i>
	54
Chapter 12	Papillophlebitis
	<i>Alyse J Richard</i>
	58
Chapter 13	Macular telangiectasia and Coats' disease
	<i>Caroline Bauman, Jordana G Fein</i>
	62
Chapter 14	Macular telangiectasia 2
	<i>Alyse J Richard</i>
	68

Chapter 15	Retinopathy of prematurity <i>Jordana G Fein, Caroline Bauman</i>	74
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Section 3: Age-related macular degeneration and mimickers

Chapter 16	Dry age-related macular degeneration <i>Jordana G Fein, Alyse J Richard</i>	81
Chapter 17	Wet (exudative) age-related macular degeneration <i>Jordana G Fein, Alyse J Richard</i>	87
Chapter 18	Central serous chorioretinopathy <i>Nora Muakkassa, Jordana G Fein</i>	92
Chapter 19	Polypoidal chorioretinopathy <i>Nora Muakkassa, Jordana G Fein</i>	97
Chapter 20	Retinal angiomatous proliferation <i>Michelle C Liang, Jordana G Fein</i>	101
Chapter 21	Pattern dystrophy <i>Jordana G Fein, Darin R Goldman</i>	106
Chapter 22	Angioid streaks <i>Jordana G Fein</i>	112
Chapter 23	Myopic degeneration <i>Jordana G Fein</i>	117

Section 4: Vitreoretinal interface abnormalities and diseases of the vitreous

Chapter 24	Full-thickness macular hole <i>Darin R Goldman</i>	125
Chapter 25	Lamellar macular hole <i>Darin R Goldman</i>	128
Chapter 26	Vitreomacular traction syndrome <i>Darin R Goldman</i>	130
Chapter 27	Epiretinal membrane <i>Darin R Goldman</i>	133
Chapter 28	Macular pseudohole <i>Darin R Goldman</i>	136
Chapter 29	Posterior vitreous detachment <i>Darin R Goldman</i>	138

Chapter 30	Vitreous hemorrhage <i>Darin R Goldman</i>	142
Chapter 31	Asteroid hyalosis <i>Darin R Goldman</i>	145
Chapter 32	Cholesterolosis (synchysis scintillans) <i>Darin R Goldman</i>	147
Chapter 33	Persistent fetal vasculature <i>Darin R Goldman</i>	149

Section 5: Other macular disorders

Chapter 34	Hydroxychloroquine maculopathy <i>Robin A Vora</i>	155
Chapter 35	Photoc maculopathy <i>Robin A Vora</i>	160
Chapter 36	Pentosan polysulfate toxic maculopathy <i>Alyse J Richard</i>	165
Chapter 37	Mitogen-activated protein kinase inhibitor toxic maculopathy <i>Alyse J Richard</i>	169

Section 6: Peripheral retinal pathology

Chapter 38	Retinal tear <i>Darin R Goldman</i>	175
Chapter 39	Retinal detachment <i>Darin R Goldman</i>	177
Chapter 40	Lattice degeneration <i>Darin R Goldman</i>	180

Section 7: Uveitis

Infectious uveitis

Chapter 41	Toxoplasmosis <i>Robin A Vora</i>	185
Chapter 42	Cat scratch disease <i>Robin A Vora</i>	190
Chapter 43	Cytomegalovirus retinitis <i>Michelle C Liang, Robin A Vora</i>	195

Chapter 44	Acute retinal necrosis <i>Robin A Vora</i>	199
Chapter 45	Endophthalmitis <i>Robin A Vora</i>	204
Chapter 46	Syphilitic chorioretinitis <i>Robin A Vora</i>	208
Chapter 47	Tuberculosis <i>Robin A Vora</i>	212
Chapter 48	Unilateral acute idiopathic maculopathy <i>Robin A Vora</i>	217
Chapter 49	Presumed ocular histoplasmosis syndrome <i>Alyse J Richard</i>	221

Noninfectious uveitis

Chapter 50	Sarcoid <i>Robin A Vora</i>	224
Chapter 51	Vitreoretinal lymphoma <i>Robin A Vora</i>	228
Chapter 52	Multifocal evanescent white dot syndrome <i>Robin A Vora</i>	231
Chapter 53	Acute multifocal placoid pigment epitheliopathy <i>Robin A Vora</i>	235
Chapter 54	Acute macular neuroretinopathy <i>Robin A Vora</i>	239
Chapter 55	Punctate inner choroidopathy <i>Robin A Vora</i>	243
Chapter 56	Birdshot chorioretinopathy <i>Robin A Vora</i>	248
Chapter 57	Intermediate uveitis <i>Sundeep K Kasi, Robin A Vora</i>	253
Chapter 58	Vogt–Koyanagi–Harada syndrome <i>Sundeep K Kasi, Robin A Vora</i>	257
Chapter 59	Behçet’s disease <i>Sundeep K Kasi, Robin A Vora</i>	261

Section 8: Hereditary retinal and choroidal dystrophies

Chapter 60	Retinitis pigmentosa <i>Robin A Vora</i>	267
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Chapter 61	Cone and cone–rod dystrophy <i>Robin A Vora</i>	271
Chapter 62	Stargardt’s disease <i>Robin A Vora</i>	275
Chapter 63	Autosomal recessive bestrophinopathy <i>Robin A Vora</i>	279
Chapter 64	Choroidal dystrophies <i>Lauren S Taney, Robin A Vora</i>	283
Chapter 65	Oculocutaneous albinism <i>Robin A Vora</i>	287
Chapter 66	X-linked retinoschisis <i>Robin A Vora</i>	291
Chapter 67	Unilateral retinal pigment epithelium dysgenesis <i>Alyse J Richard</i>	295

Section 9: Neoplasms and focal lesions

Chapter 68	Choroidal nevus <i>Darin R Goldman</i>	301
Chapter 69	Choroidal melanoma <i>Alyse J Richard</i>	306
Chapter 70	Focal scleral nodules <i>Alyse J Richard</i>	312
Chapter 71	Scleral choroidal calcifications <i>Darin R Goldman</i>	316
Chapter 72	Choroidal osteoma <i>Alyse J Richard</i>	320
Chapter 73	Choroidal hemangioma <i>Darin R Goldman</i>	323
Chapter 74	Cavernous hemangioma <i>Darin R Goldman</i>	329
Chapter 75	Capillary hemangioma <i>Darin R Goldman</i>	332
Chapter 76	Combined hamartoma of the retina and retinal pigment epithelium <i>Darin R Goldman</i>	337
Chapter 77	Retinoblastoma <i>Darin R Goldman</i>	341
Chapter 78	Choroidal metastases <i>Darin R Goldman</i>	345

Section 10: Trauma

Chapter 79	Commotio retinae <i>Darin R Goldman</i>	353
Chapter 80	Choroidal rupture <i>Darin R Goldman</i>	357
Chapter 81	Valsalva retinopathy <i>Darin R Goldman</i>	360
Chapter 82	Purtscher's retinopathy <i>Darin R Goldman</i>	363
Chapter 83	Intraocular foreign body <i>Darin R Goldman</i>	366
Chapter 84	Nonaccidental trauma (shaken baby syndrome) <i>Darin R Goldman</i>	369

Section 11: Surgical complications

Chapter 85	Silicone oil emulsification <i>Darin R Goldman</i>	375
Chapter 86	Retained perfluorocarbon <i>Darin R Goldman</i>	378
Chapter 87	Globe perforation from local anesthesia <i>Darin R Goldman</i>	381
Chapter 88	Suprachoroidal hemorrhage <i>Darin R Goldman</i>	384
Index		389

How to approach a patient with vision loss and an acute occlusion of a retinal artery

Identify the primary pathologic clinical finding(s)		
On examination, the patient will demonstrate arterial occlusion with an area of retinal ischemia/whitening, and if acute, there may be the presence of a cherry-spot in the center of the macula.		
Formulate a differential diagnosis		
Most likely	Less likely	Least likely
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central or branch retinal arterial obstruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comotio retinae, infectious (herpetic) retinitis, ocular ischemic syndrome (OIS) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tay–Sachs’s disease, Niemann–Pick’s disease
Query patient history		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How long has the patient been experiencing symptoms? Any previous episodes of amaurosis fugax? Pain? Any history of trauma? Any previous history of stroke, atrial fibrillation, or carotid disease? Is the patient immunocompromised? 		
Decide on ancillary diagnostic imaging		
The diagnosis of an arterial obstruction is clinically apparent acutely when there is diffuse retinal whitening secondary to ischemia in the territory of a retinal artery accompanied by abrupt, painless vision loss. Fluorescein angiography can be helpful for confirmation or in nonacute cases.		

Ancillary diagnostic imaging interpretation

Color fundus photographs

Color fundus photographs may demonstrate the presence of a cherry-red spot within the macula as well as retinal whitening and ischemia (**Figure 4.1**).

Optical coherence tomography

Retinal thinning will be visible on optical coherence tomography in chronic cases with loss of the inner retina in areas of previous ischemia. Acutely, there may be diffuse retinal swelling in the region of ischemia (**Figure 4.2**). However, there can also be isolated retinal whitening at the level of the inner nuclear layer. This subset of retinal ischemia is termed paracentral acute middle maculopathy (PAMM) based on ischemia of the inner retinal plexus (**Figure 4.3**).

Fluorescein angiography

There is evidence of delayed arterial filling, often with a leading edge of dye in the region of the obstructed arteriole (**Figure 4.4**). Fluorescein angiography may also highlight emboli.



Figure 4.1 Color mosaic photo of central retinal artery occlusion in the left eye. There is the classic cherry-red spot centrally with retinal whitening diffusely involving the macula. There is also a splinter hemorrhage in the peripapillary region.

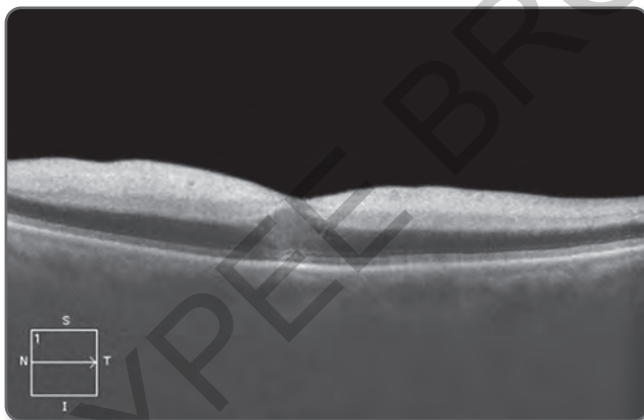


Figure 4.2 Optical coherence tomography in new onset central retinal artery occlusion. Note the thickening of the inner retina consistent with swelling from acute infarction.

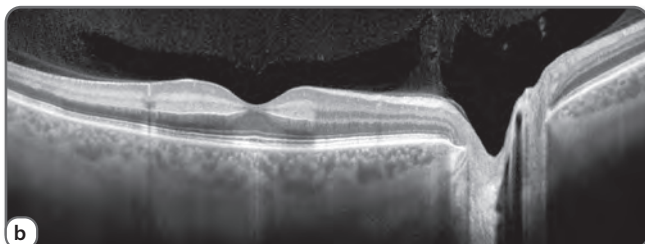
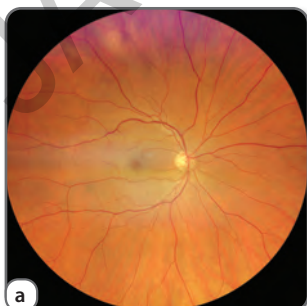


Figure 4.3 Color photograph (a) of the right eye showing deep central retinal whitening and correlating optical coherence tomography (b) showing inner retinal whitening consistent with paracentral acute middle maculopathy.

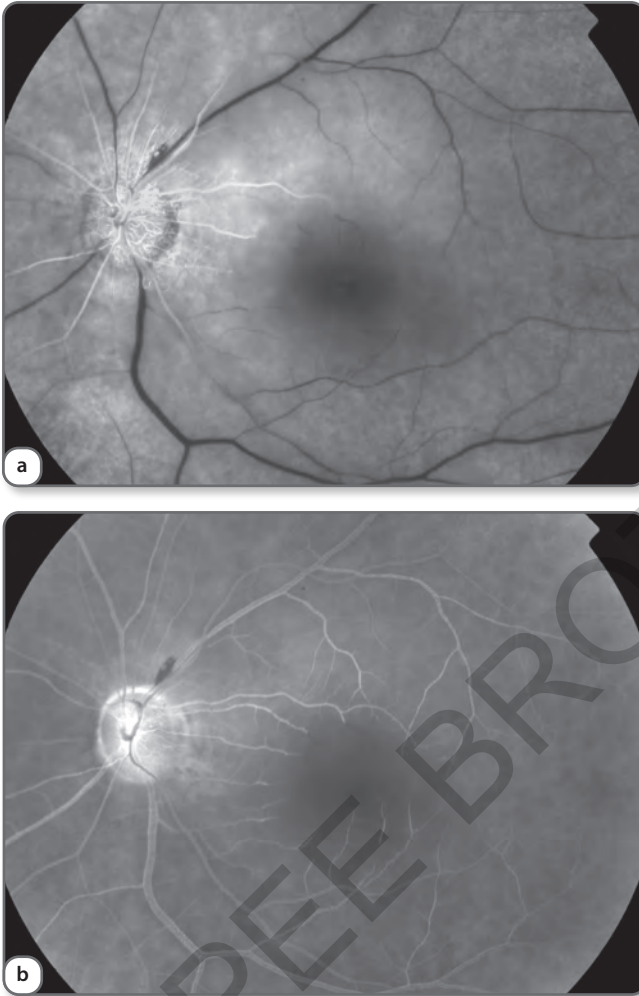


Figure 4.4 Fluorescein angiogram of a central retinal artery occlusion in the left eye at 24 seconds (a) and 300 seconds (b). Note the leading edge of dye in the arteriole, which never completely fills.

Final diagnosis: retinal arteriole occlusion

Epidemiology/etiology

Central retinal artery obstruction (CRAO) is rare, with the average patient age of 60 years. Men are affected twice as commonly as women. A central retinal arterial obstruction is most commonly due to thrombus formation at the region of the lamina cribrosa, the cause of which is most often related to atherosclerosis. Emboli are possible causes, but less common. Additional risk factors include hypercoagulable states, trauma, low-flow states from more proximal disease, optic disc drusen, active ocular infection, congenital abnormalities of the central retinal artery, and migraine. The presence of detectable emboli is visible in only 25% of patients.

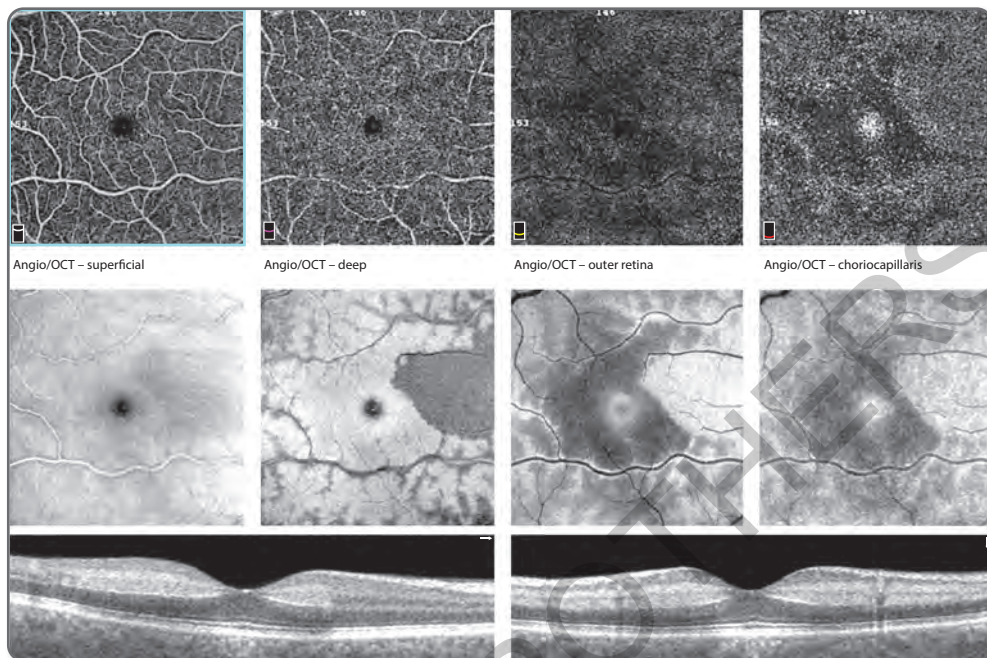


Figure 4.5 Optical coherence tomography angiography (OCTA) showing a fern like pattern highlighting the deep capillary plexus ischemia. CRAO- with OCT on bottom line showing PAMM.

Branch retinal artery obstruction (BRAO) more commonly affects the right eye and is more commonly related to emboli (two-thirds of cases). Typically the emboli are visible at the arterial bifurcation, and originate from anywhere between the heart and ophthalmic artery. Risk factors include hypertension, hypercholesterolemia, diabetes mellitus, smoking, and a positive family history.

Symptoms and clinical findings

Patients with central artery occlusion present with painless, severe vision loss. Visual acuity is typically 20/800 or worse unless a cilioretinal artery is present and not involved. There is typically an afferent pupillary defect. On fundoscopy, there is retinal whitening indicative of acute ischemia. There may be the classic 'cherry-red' spot in the central macula that occurs because retinal ischemia causes blockage of the normal choroidal coloration everywhere except centrally where the nerve fiber layer is thin. Optical coherence tomography angiography (OCTA) can highlight the level at which retinal capillary ischemia occurred by displaying a fern like pattern in areas of capillary dropout (Figure 4.5).

Associated features in central artery occlusion include previous episodes of amaurosis fugax, visible embolus in 25%, carotid artery disease in 33%, giant cell arteritis in 5%, neovascularization of the iris in 18%, and arterial collaterals on the optic disc.

Patients with branch retinal artery occlusion may present with sectoral visual field loss typically with preservation of central vision unless the cilioretinal artery is involved.

Treatment/prognosis/follow-up

There is no proven treatment for central retinal artery occlusion. If central retinal artery obstruction is secondary to giant cell arteritis then treatment with high-dose corticosteroids is initiated to prevent contralateral vision loss.

Unfortunately, most central retinal arterial obstructions result in profound, permanent loss of vision. About one-third of patients will experience some improvement in visual acuity. The patient should be worked up medically for causes of acute stroke and often these patients are admitted to the hospital for stroke evaluation. These patients can develop neovascularization of the retina, optic disc, and iris with subsequent neovascular glaucoma. Neovascularization is treated with the application of panretinal photocoagulation.

Further reading

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HANDBOOK OF RETINAL DISEASE

A CASE-BASED APPROACH

The 2nd edition of *Handbook of Retinal Disease: A Case-Based Approach* offers a high-yield case-based model of a wide range of retinal presentations, from patients' signs and symptoms to analyses of diagnostic results and comprehensive outlines of treatment plans.

This updated version includes additional chapters, photos, and new imaging modalities that reflect the ever-changing and evolving way in which we diagnose and treat retinal pathology today.

This book includes over 85 cases, each presented with a table that summarizes the clinical findings, differential diagnosis, questions to ask the patient, and recommended imaging. After a discussion of the diagnostic imaging results, a final diagnosis is put forward with a summary of recommended treatment, prognosis, and follow-up.

With its high-quality images and deductive approach, *Handbook of Retinal Disease: A Case-Based Approach* provides trainees and practicing ophthalmologists with an invaluable and practical guide to the diagnosis and management of retinal disease in clinical practice.

- Provides a framework for working up a differential diagnosis and treatment plan based on even the most complex set of clinical findings
- Guides the ophthalmologist through the selection of diagnostic imaging techniques and interpretation of images
- Lavishly illustrated, with nearly 550 retinal images produced by the full array of relevant modalities



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