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Coats' Disease

Coats' disease is a chronic, progressive disorder that affects the retina, the light-sensitive nerve layer in the back of the eye. Coats' disease is an abnormal growth spurt of the small blood vessels that nourish the retina. The fragile abnormal vessels break and leak the clear serum part of the blood into the retina, causing the retina to swell and even detach.

Coats' disease usually affects children (especially boys) in the first ten to twenty years of life, but it can also affect young adults. The condition can affect central vision, typically in only one eye. Severity can range from mild vision loss to total retinal detachment and blindness. Glaucoma can also develop. No cause has yet been identified for Coats' disease.

Referral to a retinal specialist is usually necessary. The leaking blood vessels can be treated with laser surgery or cryotherapy (freezing). If the retina is detached, a vitrectomy to replace the vitreous (the clear gel-like substance inside the eye) with a gas bubble may be necessary to restore vision.