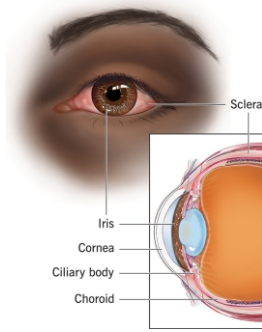


What is Uveitis?

Uveitis is inflammation (swelling) of the middle layer of the eye called the 'uvea'. It usually occurs as episodes or attacks. The attacks of uveitis can occur again and again and a person can lose vision if it is not properly treated or not treated in time.

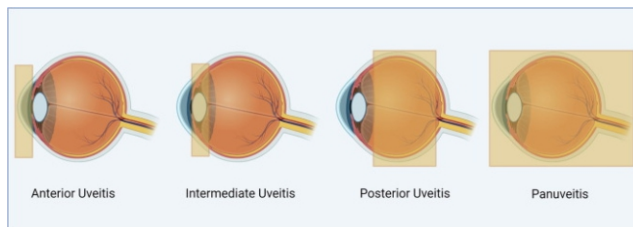


Which part of the eye is the Uvea?

The Uvea is the middle layer of the eyeball. The eye is made of three layers. The outermost layer keeps the contents intact and maintains its shape. The innermost layer is the retina, which is highly specialized tissue and forms the image that is sent to the brain via the optic nerve. The middle layer is the 'uvea' and is responsible for the 'housekeeping' of the eye. It carries the blood vessels, nerves, pigment cells and immune cells. It extends from the front to the back of the eye and has different names in different parts.

What are the types of uveitis?

The part of the uvea that is involved determines the type of uveitis. It can be the front part called 'anterior uveitis', the middle part called 'intermediate uveitis' and the part at the back called 'posterior uveitis'. When all the parts are affected it is called 'panuveitis'. Panuveitis and posterior uveitis are the most serious type of uveitis, then intermediate type and the least serious is anterior uveitis.



What are the symptoms of Uveitis?

The symptoms depend on the location of the uveitis. Anterior uveitis usually presents as a painful, red eye with mild blurring of vision. Light hurts the eye. In intermediate and posterior uveitis, the eye is not so painful but the patient sees multiple small floaters (like a dust storm) with or without blurring or loss of vision.

What Causes Uveitis?

Uveitis is inflammation of the uvea. Normally this inflammation occurs as a response to something such as an injury or an infection and helps to heal the damage. But in a majority of the patients with uveitis this is not the case. The inflammation then is thought to occur due to an abnormal triggering of the body's immune system causing the uveitis and can then damage the eye. These types of diseases are called autoimmune diseases.

Of course before labeling the disease as autoimmune your doctor orders some tests. The tests will depend on the type of uveitis that you have. The tests are done to detect any infections or other diseases in the body that may be associated with uveitis.

How is Uveitis Treated?

Uveitis is treated by treating the infection, if any, along with medicines that decrease the swelling. These agents are called 'anti-inflammatory agents' and are the main part of the treatment. These are often steroids in the form of eye drops, injections around or in the eye and they may be as tablets. Steroids are very essential for the treatment and can save the vision. But if they need to be given for a long time (more than 3 months), then they can have significant side effects. Then other anti-inflammatory agents called immuno-suppressive agents may be used. In some situations very high dose steroids are given intravenously.



What are the major side effects of steroids?

Prolonged use of steroid eye drops can lead to cataract, glaucoma, drooping of eyelid, infections. Oral intake can lead to stomach irritation, rise in blood sugars and blood pressure, weight gain especially on the face, infections, water retention, mood swings. Prolonged intake can cause decrease in the calcium in bones (osteoporosis). When required to take steroids for long it is better to be regularly checked by a physician and take supplemental calcium. Though steroids have many side effects they are essential for the treatment of the disease.

Uveitis



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