



Uveitis

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What is uveitis?

Uveitis is inflammation of the middle coloured (pigmented) layer of the eye, called the uvea or uveal tract. Uveitis usually affects people aged 20 to 59, but it can occur at any age, including in children. Men and women are affected equally. It's estimated that two to five in every 10,000 people will be affected by uveitis in the UK every year. Despite being an uncommon eye condition, uveitis is a leading cause of visual impairment in the UK. It's estimated that the more serious types of uveitis are responsible for one in every 10 cases of visual impairment in the UK. This is why it's very important to confirm a diagnosis of uveitis as soon as possible if you develop symptoms that could be related to the condition, we have a dedicated uveitis service, where patients with acute and chronic disease are seen, and particular expertise is available in the management of complex cases. We can offer advice on all aspects of the medical and surgical management of all patients with these diseases, including children.

How uveitis affects vision and what causes it

The uvea is made up of the iris (coloured part of the eye), the ciliary body (ring of muscle behind the iris) and the choroid (layer of tissue that supports the retina). Uveitis occurs when the uvea becomes inflamed. Common symptoms of uveitis include: pain in one or both eyes; redness of the eye; blurred vision; sensitivity to light (photophobia) and floaters (shadows that move across your field of vision). There are a wide range of potential causes for uveitis. Many cases are thought to be the result of a problem with the immune system, called an autoimmune disorder (where the body's defence against illness and infection attacks the body tissues). Less common causes of uveitis include an infection or injury to the eye.

Types of uveitis

The type of uveitis depends on which part of the eye is affected but the most common forms are: Anterior uveitis this is inflammation of the iris (iritis) or inflammation of the iris and the ciliary body (iridocyclitis), and is the most common type of uveitis, accounting for about three out of four cases. Intermediate uveitis this affects the area around and behind the ciliary body. Posterior uveitis – this affects the area at the back of the eye, the choroid and the retina. In some cases, uveitis can affect both the front and back of the eye. This is known as panuveitis.

Treatments for uveitis

The main treatment of uveitis is steroid medication (corticosteroids) which can reduce inflammation inside the eye. Several different types of steroid medication may be used, depending on the type of uveitis you have. Eye drops are often used for uveitis affecting the front of the eye, whereas injections, tablets and capsules are more often used to treat uveitis affecting the middle and back of the eye. In some cases, other treatments may also be needed in addition to corticosteroids. These include eye drops to relieve pain or widen (dilate) the pupil, a type of medication called an immunosuppressant, and, rarely, surgery. The sooner uveitis is treated, the more likely the condition can be successfully treated.



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Complications

Although most cases of uveitis respond quickly to treatment and cause no further problems, there is a risk of complications. The risk is higher in people who have intermediate or posterior uveitis, or who have repeated episodes of uveitis. Complications of uveitis include glaucoma and retinal damage and can cause permanent damage of the eye and loss of vision.

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