

Ophthalmology Department

Uveitis

Patient Information Leaflet

You have been given this leaflet because your clinician thinks you may have uveitis.

What is uveitis?

Uveitis is inflammation of the middle layer of the eye, called the uvea or uveal tract. It can cause eye pain and changes to your vision.

Most cases get better with treatment – usually steroid medicine in drops. But sometimes, uveitis can lead to further eye problems such as glaucoma and cataracts.

What causes uveitis?

Some cases of uveitis are linked to a problem with the immune system (the body's defence against infection and illness). This is when the immune system mistakenly attacks healthy tissue.

Possible autoimmune conditions that are linked to uveitis include:

- Ankylosing spondylitis
- Reactive arthritis
- Psoriatic arthritis
- Multiple sclerosis
- Behçet's disease
- Sarcoidosis
- Juvenile idiopathic arthritis

Infections linked to uveitis include:

- Toxoplasmosis
- Herpes simplex virus
- Varicella-zoster virus

Cytomegalovirus

- Tuberculosis
- HIV and syphilis

Uveitis can also be caused by:

- Trauma or injury to the eyes, or eye surgery
- Some types of cancers, such as lymphoma

Frequently, a specific cause of uveitis cannot be identified.

HLA B-27 gene

A gene known as HLA-B27 has been linked to an increased risk of developing uveitis. About half of all people with uveitis affecting the front part of the eye (anterior uveitis) have the HLA-B27 gene.

Treatment

Treatment for uveitis depends on what is causing it and which area of the eye is affected. Most cases of uveitis can be treated with steroids. Steroids work by disrupting the normal function of the immune system so it no longer releases the chemicals that cause inflammation.

Steroid eye drops

In some people, steroid eyedrops can increase pressure in the eye and we will check and advise you if this happens. Do not stop using your eye drops until a doctor tells you it is safe to do so, even if your symptoms disappear. Stopping treatment too soon could lead to your symptoms returning.

Steroid injections

If the middle or back of your eye is affected or steroid eyedrops have not worked, you may need steroid injections. Local anaesthetic eyedrops are used to numb your eye so you will not feel any pain or discomfort.

Steroids tablets or capsules

Steroids tablets or capsules are the strongest form of steroids. They are usually used in uveitis affecting the back of the eye.

Mydriatic eye drops

These eye drops enlarge (dilate) your pupils and relieve pain by relaxing the muscles in your eye. They can also reduce your risk of developing glaucoma, which affects vision. However, mydriatic eyedrops can cause some temporary blurring of your vision and problems focusing your eyes.

Treating infection

If an underlying infection is causing uveitis, the infection may also need to be treated. Viruses can be treated with anti-viral medicine. Bacterial infections can be treated with antibiotics. Fungal infections can be treated with anti-fungal medicine.

Immunosuppressants

Immunosuppressant may be recommended if you do not respond to the treatments described above. If steroid treatment is causing significant side effects, immunosuppressants can also be used to allow your dose of steroids to be reduced.

Symptom relief

The following measures may help relieve your symptoms:

- Wearing dark glasses if your eye becomes sensitive to light
- Placing a warm flannel over your eye to soothe it
- Taking painkillers, such as ibuprofen, to relieve pain

If you would like any further advice, please contact the Ophthalmic Emergency Referral Service (Eye Casualty) on 01603 288632

Hours of Service: Mon-Fri 8:30-17:30

Sat 9:00-12:30

If you have an ophthalmic emergency outside these hours, please ring 01603 286286 and ask for the on-call ophthalmologist.

