

# UVEITIS

## **WHAT IS UVEITIS?**

The eye is shaped much like a tennis ball, with three different layers of tissue surrounding the central gel-filled cavity. The innermost layer is the retina, which senses light and helps to send images to your brain. The middle layer between the sclera and retina is called the **uvea**. The outermost layer is the sclera, the strong white wall of the eye. Uveitis is inflammation of the uvea.

## **WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF THE UVEA?**

The uvea contains many blood vessels (veins, arteries, and capillaries) and nourishes the important parts of the eye, such as the retina. Inflammation of the uvea can damage your sight.

## **WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF UVEITIS?**

Symptoms of uveitis include:

- light sensitivity;
- blurred vision;
- pain;
- floaters;
- redness of the eye.

Uveitis may develop suddenly with redness and pain, or it may develop with a painless blurring of vision. A case of “red eye” may in fact be caused by uveitis. If your eye becomes red and painful, you should see an ophthalmologist.

## **WHAT CAUSES UVEITIS?**

Uveitis has many different causes:

- a virus, such as shingles, mumps, or herpes simplex;
- a fungus, such as histoplasmosis;
- a parasite, such as toxoplasmosis;
- a related disease in another part of the body, such as arthritis, gastrointestinal disease, or collagen vascular disease;
- a result of an injury to the eye.

However, in most cases of uveitis, the cause of the disease remains unknown.

## **HOW IS UVEITIS DIAGNOSED?**

A careful eye examination is important when symptoms occur. Inflammation inside the eye can permanently affect sight or even lead to blindness if untreated. Your ophthalmologist will examine the inside of your eye. He or she may order blood tests, skin tests, or x-rays to help make the diagnosis. Since uveitis can be associated with disease in other parts of the body, your ophthalmologist will want to know about your overall health. He or she may want to consult with your primary care physician or other medical specialists.

## **ARE THERE DIFFERENT KINDS OF UVEITIS?**

There are different types of uveitis, depending on which part of the eye is affected. When the uvea is inflamed near the front of the eye, it is called **iritis**. Iritis has a sudden onset and may last six to eight weeks.

If the uvea is inflamed in the middle of the eye, it is called **cyclitis**. Cyclitis affects the muscle that focuses the lens. Cyclitis can also develop suddenly and can last for several months.

An inflammation in the back of the eye is called **choroiditis**. Choroiditis is slower to develop and may last longer.

## **HOW IS UVEITIS TREATED?**

Uveitis is a serious eye condition that may scar the eye. It needs to be treated as soon as possible. Eye drops, especially corticosteroids and pupil dilators, can reduce inflammation and pain. For more severe inflammation, oral medication or injections may be necessary.

Uveitis can be associated with these complications:

- glaucoma (increased pressure in the eye);
- cataract (clouding of the eye's natural lens);
- neovascularization (growth of new, abnormal blood vessels);
- damage to the retina, including retinal detachment.

These complications may require laser surgery, or even conventional surgery.

If you have a "red eye" that does not clear up reasonably quickly, contact your ophthalmologist.