

UVEITIS

What is Uveitis?

Uveitis is inflammation of the middle lining of the eye which is known as the uvea. It usually occurs between the ages of 20-50years but occasionally in childhood and old age. The inflammation can be in the front of the eye, the back of the eye, or both. Uveitis can affect one or both eyes.

What causes Uveitis?

Uveitis is a puzzling condition and in the vast majority of cases we do not know what causes it. Occasionally it is due to an infection but in most cases we suspect an abnormality in our immune system. In some patients the uveitis is associated with inflammation in other parts of the body, so it is usual to have a number of blood tests and x-rays performed to see if we can find evidence of inflammation elsewhere.

What are the symptoms?

The commonest type of inflammation is of the iris - the coloured part of the eye, and this is also known as iritis. Symptoms are of pain, redness and sensitivity to light. Inflammation involving the back of the eye usually results in seeing floaters and sometimes poor vision.

What are the complications of uveitis?

In the majority of patients, particularly those with inflammation only affecting the front of the eye, permanent damage to the vision is highly unlikely if the prescribed treatment is adhered to.

The main complications that can affect the vision are:

cataract - clouding, of the normally clear focusing lens of the eye, which blocks light entering the eye.

glaucoma - raised pressure inside the eye leading to damage to the main nerve of the eye.

swelling of the macula - damaging the reading/writing part of the retina (the innermost light sensitive layer of the eye).

What is the treatment?

If the inflammation is in the front part of the eye then eyedrops are effective. These are steroid drops which stop the inflammation, and dilating drops to make the pupil larger to reduce the pain and prevent complications. In patients with inflammation affecting the back of the eye causing poor vision, steroid tablets may be prescribed as drops cannot penetrate through the eye to reach the back. Please consult the doctor in the clinic who will explain about any possible side-effects.

Why does it keep coming back?

In some patients, usually with inflammation just affecting the front of the eye, recurrences are common either in the same eye or switching from one eye to the other. We do not know why this happens so we are unable to prevent it occurring.

Will it ever completely go away?

Yes. The inflammation will eventually burn itself out but in some patients it can take many years. Patients may get repeated attacks over the years or the inflammation may grumble on and continuous treatment may be required.