



Melanoma of the Eye

Your Questions Answered

Patient Information Leaflet

Melanoma

What is it?

Melanoma is a malignant (cancerous) tumour that most often arises in the skin.

Less commonly it is found in the eye and other sites in the body.

In the eye, melanoma arises from the pigmented cells (melanocytes) of the uvea.

The uvea is divided into 3 parts termed the iris (coloured, front part of the eye), ciliary body (middle part), and choroid (back part).

The uvea is comprised of blood vessels and pigmented (coloured) cells called melanocytes.

Melanocytes are cells similar to those found on the skin, in which gives you the “colour” of your skin.

A malignant melanoma of the uvea generally originates from these melanocytes, in the choroid, ciliary body or iris.

Melanoma carries the potential to spread from the eye to other parts of the body, such as the liver, therefore you will need to have a range of investigations to out rule the spread of disease.

What causes Uveal Melanoma?

The exact cause of uveal melanoma is unknown. Uveal Melanoma almost always affects one eye and it is not known to be hereditary. It can develop in an otherwise healthy individual.

What does Uveal Melanoma look like?

The appearance of melanoma depends on its size and location, whether it is anterior (in the front of the eye, the iris) or posterior (in the back of the eye, the ciliary body and choroid).

Iris melanoma appears as a brown or yellow nodule on the iris. Iris melanoma may be visible to the patient. It can also cause glaucoma (raised eye pressure), and cataract.

The ciliary body is located immediately behind the iris and in front of the choroid. In some cases the tumour can spread from the ciliary body to the iris (cilio-iris melanoma) and from the ciliary body to the choroid (cilio-choroidal melanoma). This will appear as a brown or yellow lump inside the eye.

Choroidal melanoma appears as a brown or yellow tumour in the back of the eye and is not visible to the patient. Based on tumour thickness, choroidal melanoma are classified into sizes small, medium and large.

Treatment of Iris ciliary body or choroidal Melanoma

Treatment will depend on the size of the melanoma, it can be monitoring of the tumour intermittently, surgery or plaque radiotherapy your consultant will discuss the best option for you.

Investigations

If you are diagnosed with an ocular melanoma a series of investigations **may** need to be carried out. The purpose of this is to see if the tumour has spread to other parts of the body.

The investigations that will be carried out are as follows:

Blood Tests

Your ophthalmologist will request a series of baseline blood tests:

- Full Blood Count (FBC)
- Liver Function Tests (LFTs)
- Urea & Electrolytes (U&E)

Biopsy

Your ophthalmologist **may** decide that they need to biopsy the spot in the eye to determine a diagnosis. A biopsy is a test that uses a hollow needle to remove a piece of tissue or fluid. The material is sent for histology to see if the sample taken is normal or abnormal. This procedure needs to be done in a sterile environment therefore you will need to go to theatre. You **may** be admitted to the ward. The procedure is done under anaesthetic.

Imaging

You will need further tests to determine if the tumour has spread to other parts of the body. In most cases a chest X-ray will be performed. The Consultant will decide if you need further imaging such as Computed Tomography (CT).

Following these investigations, the Consultant will decide and discuss with you and your family what treatment is right for you.

You will be seen by an ophthalmologist at least twice a year following treatment if decided. You will be referred to a medical oncologist for a check-up every 6 – 12 months.

If you have any questions, queries please do not hesitate to talk to a member of our team. We understand that this is a distressing time for you. Our team of doctors, nurses and social worker are here to help and to assist you in any way we can. If you require any further information on uveal melanoma you can contact:

**Valerie O'Neill (Clinical Nurse Specialist) on:
(01) 6644667 Mobile: 0863751148
(Monday-Friday 8-5pm)**

**If you would like to speak to a counsellor, our social worker/counsellor Joanna Lee can be contacted on
(01) 6343608**

The Irish Cancer Society also offers a free counselling service for patients with a new diagnosis.

You can make an appointment by ringing one of the following numbers that is located near your area:

Donegal: 087 2490890 or (071) 91 0399

Dublin: 087 24 08 90 or (01) 7078880

Cork: 087 68912 20 or (021) 426688

Wexford: 087 68526 28 or (053) 9238555

Drogheda: 087 12345 98 or (041) 98051 00

Mayo: 087 25 03 82 or (094) 90384 07

Portlaoise: 087 92170 37 or (057) 86814 92

Limerick: 087 9040 04

Sligo: (071) 9170399

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