Melanoma, Eye

Melanomas are abnormal growths (*tumors*) in the cells that produce melanin. These melanin cells give your skin its color (*pigment*). Eyes have melanin cells, which can develop into melanoma. When these cells develop into melanoma in the eye, they require close monitoring. Melanomas may occur in many areas of the eye:

- On the outside of the eyeball.
- On the visible part of the inside of the eye.
- In the inside of the eye where they can only be detected on exam by an eye specialist.

SYMPTOMS

There are often no symptoms of an eye melanoma (*ocular melanoma*) unless the tumor presses on a tissue required for sight or is visible to the naked eye of an observer.

In very advanced, untreated cases, a melanoma could cause:

- Pain.
- Glaucoma.
- Seeing two of everything (*double vision*).
- Inability to move the eye in one direction.
- Forward movement of the eye (*protrusion*) if it has spread beyond the eyeball itself.

DIAGNOSIS

The diagnosis is made during a physical exam. If a tumor is found, it may be evaluated further with x-rays and lab work.

TREATMENT

These tumors are very fast growing and spreading. They must be treated very aggressively. Untreated, melanomas are extremely dangerous and may lead to death. Treatment also depends upon the location and size of the melanoma, rapidity of change, and whether or not the tumor has spread beyond the eye.

The melanomas may stay in their original position (*local*), or they could get so large that they spread through or into surrounding tissues or to other parts of the body (*metastatic spread*). Treatment could include:

- Surgery to remove the tumor. The removal may include just the tumor. Sometimes, the entire eye with or without surrounding tissues may be removed.
- Radiation.
- Chemotherapy.

A combination of all of these treatments may be needed.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

You notice any change in color of the colored portion of the eye (*iris*). This may be in the form of a localized dark spot on the iris or a general change in color of the entire iris compared to the other eye (*heterochromia*).

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