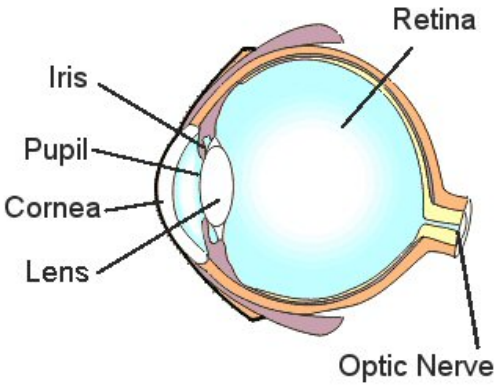
Iritis

Iritis is an inflammation of the colored part of the eye (*iris*). Other parts at the front of the eye may also be inflamed. The iris is part of the middle layer of the eyeball which is called the uvea or the uveal track. Any part of the uveal track can become inflamed. The other portions of the uveal track are the *choroid* (the thin membrane under the outer layer of the eye), and the *ciliary body* (joins the choroid and the iris and produces the fluid in the front of the eye).



It is extremely important to treat iritis early, as it may lead to internal eye damage causing scarring or diseases such as glaucoma. Some people have only one attack of iritis (in one or both eyes) in their lifetime, while others may get it many times.

CAUSES

Iritis can be associated with many different diseases, but mostly occurs in otherwise healthy people. Examples of diseases that can be associated with iritis include:

- Diseases where the body's immune system attacks tissues within your own body (*autoimmune diseases*).
- Infections (tuberculosis, gonorrhea, fungus infections, Lyme disease, infection of the lining of the heart).
- Trauma or injury.
- Eye diseases (acute glaucoma and others).
- Inflammation from other parts of the uveal track.
- Severe eye infections.
- Other rare diseases.

SYMPTOMS

- Eye pain or aching.
- Sensitivity to light.
- Loss of sight or blurred vision.
- Redness of the eye. This is often accompanied by a ring of redness around the outside of the cornea, or clear covering at the front of the eye (*ciliary flush*).
- Excessive tearing of the eye(s).
- A small pupil that does not enlarge in the dark and stays smaller than the other eye's pupil.
- A whitish area that obscures the lower part of the colored circular iris. Sometimes this is visible when looking at the eye, where the whitish area has a "fluid level" or flat top. This is called a "hypopyon" and is actually pus inside the eye.

Since iritis causes the eye to become red, it is often confused with a much less dangerous form of "pink eye" or conjunctivitis. One of the most important symptoms is sensitivity to light. **Anytime there is redness, discomfort in the eye(s) and extreme light sensitivity, it is extremely important to see an ophthalmologist as soon as possible.**

TREATMENT

Acute iritis requires prompt medical evaluation by an eye specialist (*ophthalmologist*.) Treatment depends on the underlying cause but may include:

- Corticosteroid eye drops and dilating eye drops. **Follow your caregiver's exact instructions on taking and stopping corticosteroid medications (drops or pills).**
- Occasionally, the iritis will be so severe that it will not respond to commonly used medications. If this happens, it may be necessary to use steroid injections. The injections are given under the eye's outer surface. Sometimes oral medications are given. The decision on treatment used for iritis is usually made on an individual basis.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

Your care giver will give specific instructions regarding the use of eye medications or other medications. Be certain to follow all instructions in both taking and stopping the medications.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You have redness of one or both eye.
- You experience a great deal of light sensitivity.
- You have pain or aching in either eye.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

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