

Eye Cancer: Overview



What is eye cancer?

Cancer is made of cells that grow out of control. The abnormal cells often grow to form a lump or mass called a tumor. Cancer cells can also grow into nearby areas or spread to other parts of the body. This is called metastasis.

The eyes are organs that collect light and send it to the brain. The brain turns this light into pictures that let you see. The eye is made up of many different parts. Cancer can start in any part of the eye.

Primary eye cancer is a very rare kind of cancer that starts somewhere in or on the eye or in the skin of cells around the eye. It most often starts inside the eyeball itself. This is called primary intraocular cancer. Because it's so rare, it's best to seek treatment from an eye cancer specialist.

Who is at risk for eye cancer?

A risk factor is anything that may increase your chance of having a disease. The exact cause of someone's cancer may not be known, but risk factors may make it more likely for a person to develop cancer. There are only a few factors known to increase the risk of eye cancer, and they aren't under your control.

The risk factors for eye cancer include:

- White skin
- Light-colored eyes
- Older age
- Being a man
- Having many abnormal moles (dysplastic nevus syndrome)
- Abnormal brown spots on the uvea (oculodermal melanocytosis or nevus of Ota)
- BAP1 cancer syndrome

Talk with your healthcare provider about your risk factors for eye cancer and what you can do about them.

Can eye cancer be prevented?

There's no known way to prevent eye cancer.

Are there screening tests for eye cancer?

There are no regular screening tests for eye cancer in people at average risk. Screening is done to check for disease in people who don't have symptoms.

Eye exams are an important part of routine physicals. Your eye care provider (ophthalmologist) should check for signs of cancer during regular eye exams.

If you have a lot of irregular moles on your body (dysplastic nevus syndrome), you may need to have your eyes checked more often. If you have a dark spot on your iris, see an eye care provider. If you have a mole in your eye (eye nevus), your eye care provider should check it regularly for changes.

What are the symptoms of eye cancer?

Symptoms of eye cancer can include:

- Blurry vision that's new
- Partial or total vision loss
- Seeing floating spots (floaters)
- Seeing flashes of light
- Dark spots or shadows in your vision
- A dark spot on your iris or other part of your eye
- Sensitivity to light
- A lump on your eyelid or other part of your eye
- Change in the shape of your pupil, the black center of the colored part of your eye
- Bulging of an eye
- Redness or swelling in the eye
- Change in the way your eye moves
- Pain in or around your eye

Many of these may be caused by other health problems. So it is important to see a healthcare provider if you have these symptoms. Your healthcare provider will do exams and tests to determine if you have cancer.

How is eye cancer diagnosed?

You will need to see a specially trained eye care provider (ophthalmologist). The provider will ask you about your health history, symptoms, risk factors, and family history of disease. The provider will do a complete eye exam. During the eye exam, the provider will use a special scope with a light (ophthalmoscope) to look at the inside of your eye.

You may also have one or more of these tests:

- Ultrasound of your eye
- Fluorescein angiography
- Removal of some eye fluid (vitrectomy)
- Biopsy

After a diagnosis of eye cancer, you'll likely need other tests. These help your healthcare providers learn more about the cancer. They can help determine the stage of the cancer. The stage is how much and how far the cancer has spread (metastasized) in your body. It is one of the most important things to know when deciding how to treat the cancer.

Once your cancer is staged, your healthcare provider will talk with you about what the stage means for your treatment. Be sure to ask your healthcare provider to explain the stage of your cancer to you in a way you can understand.

How is eye cancer treated?

Your treatment choices depend on the type of eye cancer you have, test results, and the stage of the cancer. The goal of treatment may be to cure you, control the cancer, or help ease problems caused by the cancer. Talk with your healthcare team about your treatment choices, the goals of treatment, and the possible risks and side effects.

Types of treatment for cancer are either local or systemic. Local treatments remove, destroy, or control cancer cells in one area. Surgery and radiation are local treatments. Systemic treatment is used to destroy or control

cancer cells that may have traveled all over your body. When taken by pill or shot (injection), chemotherapy is a systemic treatment. You may have one type of treatment or a combination of treatments.

Eye cancer can be treated with:

- Active surveillance or close monitoring
- Surgery
- Radiation
- Laser therapy
- Chemotherapy
- Targeted therapy
- Immunotherapy

Talk with your healthcare providers about your treatment choices. Make a list of questions. Think about the benefits and possible side effects of each choice. Talk about your concerns with your healthcare provider before making a decision.

What are treatment side effects?

Cancer treatment, such as chemotherapy and radiation, can damage normal cells. This can cause side effects, such as hair loss, mouth sores, and vomiting. Other treatments, such as surgery or radiation, can affect your vision.

Talk with your healthcare provider about side effects you might have and ways to manage them. There may be things you can do and medicines you can take to help prevent or control side effects.

Coping with eye cancer

Many people feel worried, depressed, and stressed when dealing with cancer. Getting treatment for cancer can be hard on the mind and body. Keep talking with your healthcare team about any problems or concerns you have. Work together to ease the effect of cancer and its symptoms on your daily life.

Here are some tips:

- Talk with your family or friends.
- Ask your healthcare team or social worker for help.
- Speak with a counselor.
- Talk with a spiritual advisor, such as a minister or rabbi.
- Ask your healthcare team about medicines for depression or anxiety.
- Keep socially active.
- Join a cancer support group.

Cancer treatment is also hard on the body. To help yourself stay healthier, try to:

- Eat a healthy diet, with a focus on high-protein foods.
- Drink plenty of water, fruit juices, and other liquids.
- Keep physically active.
- Rest as much as needed.

- Talk with your healthcare team about ways to manage treatment side effects.
- Take your medicines as directed by your team.

When should I call my healthcare provider?

Your healthcare provider will talk with you about when to call. You may be told to call if you have any of the following:

- New symptoms or symptoms that get worse
- Signs of an infection, such as a fever
- Side effects of treatment that affect your daily function or don't get better with treatment

Ask your healthcare provider what signs to watch for and when to call. Know how to get help after office hours and on weekends and holidays.

Next steps

Tips to help you get the most from a visit to your healthcare provider:

- Know the reason for your visit and what you want to happen.
- Before your visit, write down questions you want answered.
- Bring someone with you to help you ask questions and remember what your provider tells you.
- At the visit, write down the name of a new diagnosis and any new medicines, treatments, or tests. Also write down any new instructions your provider gives you.
- Know why a new medicine or treatment is prescribed and how it will help you. Also know what the side effects are and when they should be reported.
- Ask if your condition can be treated in other ways.
- Know why a test or procedure is recommended and what the results could mean.
- Know what to expect if you do not take the medicine or have the test or procedure.
- If you have a follow-up appointment, write down the date, time, and purpose for that visit.
- Know how you can contact your healthcare provider if you have questions, especially after office hours or on weekends.

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