

What is uveitis?



Uveitis is a general term used when there is inflammation inside the eye. It is a potentially sight-threatening problem.

Uveitis can be anterior, intermediate or posterior affecting the iris, ciliary body, vitreous, retina, choroid and the optic nerve. It may be caused by infections and can be associated with an underlying systemic disease.

While uncommon, it is a potentially serious condition and if untreated or under-treated, can lead to scarring and blindness. **It requires urgent detection and treatment.**

Uveitis is the third leading cause of blindness worldwide.

There are several types of uveitis

- **Anterior:** the most common form, occurs in very young to middle-aged people. It occurs when the iris and the ciliary body become inflamed, and has been linked to sufferers of rheumatologic, skin, gastrointestinal, lung and infectious diseases.
- **Intermediate:** occurs mostly in children, teenagers and young adults. It occurs when the area behind the ciliary body and the vitreous becomes inflamed and has been linked to sufferers of inflammatory bowel disease, sarcoidosis and multiple sclerosis.
- **Posterior:** the least common type, occurs when the choroid and the retina at the back of the eye become inflamed.
- **Panuveitis:** when all three major parts of the eye are affected by inflammation.

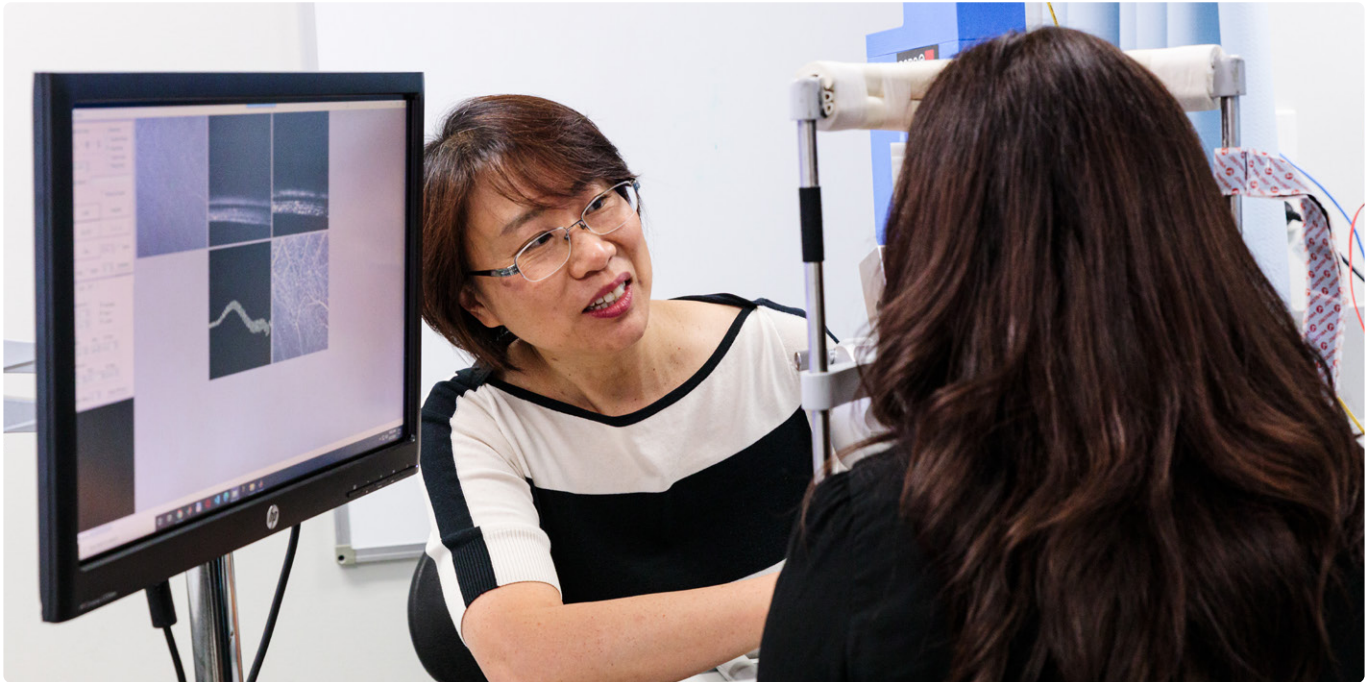


What causes uveitis?

Uveitis is caused by inflammatory responses inside the eye to tissue damage, germs or toxins.

In many cases however, the specific trigger is unknown, but can include:

- **Eye injury**
- An **autoimmune disorder**, such as sarcoidosis or ankylosing spondylitis
- An **infection**, such as cat-scratch disease, herpes zoster, syphilis, toxoplasmosis, tuberculosis, Lyme disease or West Nile virus
- **Medications**
- Sometimes a **blood cancer** affecting the eye can mimic uveitis
- **Smoking:** a recent study shows a significant association between uveitis and cigarette smoking.



What are the symptoms of uveitis?

Uveitis symptoms may develop gradually over hours or days. Acute cases last for a few weeks, while chronic cases may last for more than three months. The severest forms of uveitis reoccur.

Common symptoms include:

- Eye redness
- Eye pain
- Light sensitivity
- Blurred vision
- Dark, floating spots (floaters) in your field of vision
- Flashing lights
- Decreased vision.

How is uveitis diagnosed?

Your ophthalmologist will **review your medical history** and **conduct a variety of tests** including photography and a range of other non-invasive procedures to inspect the interior of your eye.

Blood tests may also be necessary for your ophthalmologist to determine if an infection or other condition is triggering the uveitis. Sometimes a **tissue biopsy** may be necessary.

How is uveitis treated?

The goal of uveitis treatment is to reduce pain and inflammation, prevent damage to the eye, restore any vision loss, and at the same time, minimise side effects of treatment.

The type of treatment will depend on the type of inflammation present.

Possible uveitis treatments include:

- Corticosteroid eye drops
- Corticosteroid implants surgically implanted inside the eye
- Oral steroid medications
- Immunosuppressant therapy
- Antibiotics or antiviral medication if infection is present.

Need to know more?

Please contact the Lions Eye Institute to make an appointment with one of our ophthalmologists. Phone: (08) 9381 0777; email: carecentre@lei.org.au; or see our website: lei.org.au