



Ocular Melanoma Fact Sheet

A Rare but Life-Altering Eye Cancer

Knowledge is Power – Early Detection Saves Lives

What is Ocular (Uveal) Melanoma?

Ocular melanoma is a rare cancer that develops in the eye's pigment-producing cells. The **uvea**—the middle layer of the eye—contains most of the eye's melanocytes and is the **primary site** for this cancer. This form is called **uveal melanoma** and is the **most common type** of intraocular (within the eye) cancer in adults.

Ocular Melanoma Types

- **Choroidal Melanoma**

- Location: Choroid (the vascular layer at the back of the eye, part of the uvea)
- Prevalence: ~85–90% of all uveal melanoma cases
- Odds: About 1 in 100,000 per year in the general population
- Notes: This is the most common type of ocular melanoma. It often grows silently until vision is affected or it is found during a routine eye exam.

- **Ciliary Body Melanoma**

- Location: Ciliary body (the ring-shaped part of the uvea behind the iris)
- Prevalence: ~6–8% of uveal melanomas
- Odds: Much rarer than choroidal melanoma; fewer than 1 in 1,000,000 per year
- Notes: Often difficult to detect early; may grow larger before diagnosis due to hidden location.

- **Iris Melanoma**

- Location: Iris (the colored part of the eye)
- Prevalence: ~4–5% of uveal melanomas
- Odds: Estimated at less than 1 in 5,000,000 per year
- Notes: Usually slow-growing and visible, making early detection more likely; tends to have a better prognosis.

- **Conjunctival Melanoma**

- Location: Conjunctiva (the thin membrane covering the white part of the eye and inner eyelids)
- Prevalence: <5% of all ocular melanomas (not uveal)
- Odds: Roughly 1–2 cases per million people per year
- Notes: Behaves similarly to skin melanoma; can spread to lymph nodes and lungs if untreated.



- **Orbital Melanoma**

- Location: Orbit (the socket and tissues surrounding the eyeball)
- Prevalence: Extremely rare
- Odds: Unknown due to its rarity, often related to metastasis or extension from nearby structures
- Notes: May be primary or secondary (spread from another site); typically presents with pain, swelling, or vision changes.

- **Secondary (Metastatic) Melanoma to the Eye**

- Location: Any part of the eye, often the choroid
- Prevalence: Not considered primary ocular melanoma
- Odds: More common in patients with advanced skin melanoma
- Notes: The eye—particularly the choroid—is a common site for metastasis from cutaneous melanoma, breast, or lung cancers.

 **Statistics**

-  ~2,000–2,500 cases diagnosed annually in the U.S.
-  More common in Caucasians, people aged 50–70

- 🧐 Accounts for ~5% of all melanoma cases
 - ⚠️ Metastasis in ~50% of cases—especially to the **liver**
 - 📊 Median survival after metastasis: ~6–12 months (research is improving this)
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⚠️ Common Symptoms

Uveal melanoma often shows no early symptoms, but can include:

- Blurry or distorted vision
 - Flashes or floaters
 - Dark spot on the iris
 - Peripheral vision loss
 - Change in pupil shape
 - Pain or pressure (rare)
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🔬 How It's Diagnosed

- Comprehensive **dilated eye exam**
 - **Ultrasound** of the eye (B-scan)
 - **OCT** (optical coherence tomography)
 - **Fundus photography**
 - **Fluorescein angiography**
 - **MRI, CT, or biopsy** if metastasis is suspected
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🧬 Risk Factors

- Light eye color (blue/green)
 - Fair skin or tendency to sunburn
 - Older age
 - Genetic mutations (e.g., BAP1, GNAQ, GNA11)
 - Family or personal history of skin melanoma
 - Certain genetic syndromes (e.g., BAP1 Tumor Predisposition Syndrome)
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Treatment Options

Treatment depends on the tumor's size, location, and spread:

- **Plaque brachytherapy** (radioactive disc placed on eye)
 - **Proton beam or gamma knife radiation**
 - **Laser photocoagulation** (rarely used)
 - **Surgical removal** (local resection or **enucleation**)
 - **Immunotherapy, targeted therapy, or clinical trials** (for metastatic cases)
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Living with Ocular Melanoma


- Regular **liver function tests** and imaging to monitor for spread
 - Emotional support & counseling can help manage stress
 - Vision changes or loss are possible, even after treatment
 - Long-term survivorship varies—early detection improves outcomes
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Support and Advocacy

- Connect with **ocular melanoma communities** and **survivor groups**
 - Participate in **clinical trials** and research initiatives
 - Advocate for **dilated eye exams** and **rare cancer funding**
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Why Eye Exams Matter

Dilated eye exams are **the only way to detect ocular melanoma early**, especially if you have no symptoms. Ask your eye doctor to examine the **back of your eye** and **check the choroid**.

 **Recommended:** Eye exams every 1–2 years for adults; yearly if at high risk.

Share This – Raise Awareness

Help us spread the word with the hashtag:

#OcularMelanoma #UvealMelanoma #DilatedEyeExam

Learn More or Get Involved

Visit **OcularCancer.com** for:

- Reliable information on rare eye cancers
- Support resources for patients and caregivers
- News, events, and research updates
- Awareness campaigns and printable materials