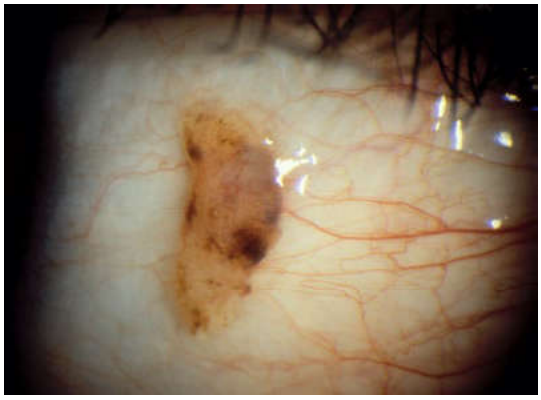
Nevus

What is a nevus?

A nevus is sometimes called a "freckle of the eye." It is a common, colored growth, similar to a mole on your skin. You can have a nevus in the front of your eye, around the iris, or under the retina at the back of the eye. A nevus under the retina is called a choroidal nevus.

An eye nevus is usually harmless. However, it needs to be watched regularly because, like a skin mole, it could possibly develop into cancer of the eye.



A nevus on the surface (conjunctiva) of the eye

A nevus under the retina (called a choroidal nevus)

What causes a nevus?

A nevus is made up of cells called melanocytes. These are the same cells that make the pigment that colors our skin, hair and eyes. Most of the time, melanocytes are spread evenly throughout body tissue. However, sometimes these cells can cluster together, forming nevi.

People can be born with nevi. A pigmented spot that develops later in life is usually still harmless, but does have a greater risk of becoming cancer.

Eye Words to Know

Nevi: (Plural) More than one nevus.

Iris: The colored part of your eye (blue, brown, green, hazel).

Retina: Layer of nerve cells lining the back wall inside the eye. This layer senses light and sends signals to the brain so you can see.

How is a nevus diagnosed?

Your ophthalmologist can find a nevus during a routine eye exam to check the inside of your eye. A choroidal nevus usually looks gray, but it can also be brown, yellow or a combination of colors.

Nevi that are orange, thicker than usual or are leaking fluid are considered suspicious.

Your ophthalmologist may use imaging technology to examine the nevus more closely.

Your ophthalmologist will take a picture of the nevus. That helps them see if there are any changes in its appearance the next time you visit.

Most nevi are harmless, but some may not be. Sometimes a nevus can look like melanoma (a type of cancer). Your ophthalmologist may ask you to have the nevus re-checked in six months. If the nevus does not change over a year or two, it is not likely to be a melanoma. But nevi can change to a melanoma as you age, so you should have it checked by an ophthalmologist every year throughout life.

How is a nevus treated?

Most nevi do not need to be treated.

In rare cases, a nevus on the outer wall of the eye affecting the eye's appearance may be removed with surgery.

Your ophthalmologist will not endanger your eye by removing a harmless nevus inside the eye. However, all nevi should be examined regularly by your ophthalmologist. This is how they can detect changes that could mean the nevus is becoming cancerous.

Every time you visit your ophthalmologist, your nevus should be examined to compare it to earlier photographs. Any changes in the size or shape of the nevus means it needs to be examined more closely. New photographs will be taken every few years or anytime your doctor sees a change.

Summary

A nevus is a common, colored growth in your eye, similar to a mole on your skin.

An eye nevus is usually harmless. However, it needs to be watched regularly because, like a skin mole, it could possibly develop into cancer of the eye.

You should have a nevus checked by an ophthalmologist every year throughout your life.

Get more information about nevus from EyeSmart—provided by the American Academy of Ophthalmology—at **aao.org/nevus-link**.

COMPLIMENTS OF:

BRYAN VEKOVIUS, M.D.

OCULOPLASTIC SURGERY AND
NEURO-OPHTHALMOLOGY

450 ASHLEY RIDGE BLVD.
SHREVEPORT, LA 71106

(318) 675-3733

©2018 American Academy of Ophthalmology
Content last reviewed 09/18