# Scleritis

## What is scleritis?

Scleritis is a painful **inflammation** of the white part of the eye, called the **sclera**.

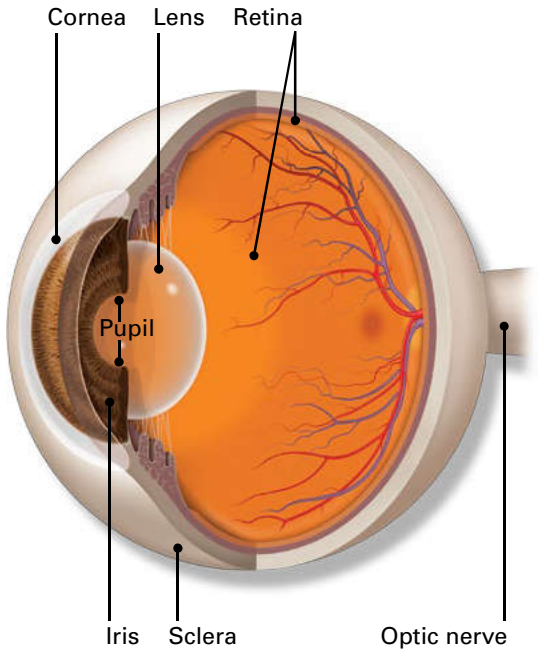
In almost half of all cases, scleritis is associated with an underlying **autoimmune disease** such as rheumatoid arthritis.

There are two main types of scleritis: anterior and posterior.

**Anterior scleritis**, the most common type, affects the front part of the sclera. There are three types of anterior scleritis:

- **Diffuse scleritis** is the most common type and the most treatable. This type causes widespread redness and inflammation throughout the whole or a portion of the front portion of the sclera.
- **Nodular scleritis**, is known for nodules or bumps, often tender to the touch, on the surface of the eye.
- **Necrotizing scleritis** is the most severe form of anterior scleritis. It can destroy scleral tissues and in rare cases may lead to loss of the eye(s). This form can cause extreme pain and tenderness (although a rare form can occur without pain).

**Posterior scleritis**, the rarer form, affects the back part of the eye. It is often not related to an automimmune disease. Posterior scleritis can develop on its own or with the anterior form of scleritis. People with this type of scleritis may have pain and tenderness. This form can cause complications resulting in retinal detachment and angle-closure glaucoma.




## Eye Words to Know

**Sclera:** The white part of the eye. The sclera is made up of tough, fibrous tissues and forms a protective outer layer of the eye.

**Autoimmune disease:** When your immune system can't tell the difference between healthy cells and threatening germs, like viruses or bacteria. Your body then attacks its own healthy tissues.

**Inflammation:** When part of the body becomes red, irritated, swollen, or painful. This can happen when the body is fighting an infection or in response to an injury.

## What causes scleritis?

Scleritis is often associated with an autoimmune disorder. In other cases, the cause is unknown.

Scleritis may be associated with:

- different forms of arthritis
- eye infection
- lupus
- certain connective tissue disease
- inflammatory bowel disease
- Sjogren's syndrome
- granulomatosis
- scleroderma

Scleritis may be caused by trauma (injury) to the eye. In rare cases it may be caused by a fungus or a parasite.

## What are symptoms of scleritis?

Scleritis symptoms can include:

- severe pain
- tenderness of the eye
- inflammation of the white part of the eye
- blurred vision
- tearing
- extreme sensitivity to light

There also can be pain of the jaw, face, or head of the affected side. In some cases, partial or complete loss of vision is possible.

## How is scleritis diagnosed?

If you have symptoms of scleritis, you should see an ophthalmologist as soon as possible. Scleritis left untreated can lead to vision loss.

During your exam, your ophthalmologist will:

- look at the inside and outside of your eye using a special microscope called a slit lamp
- ask you about your overall health

Your ophthalmologist may work with your primary care physician or other specialists to help diagnose you. Blood tests, imaging tests, or other testing may be needed.

## How is scleritis treated?

Scleritis is a serious condition that can lead to loss of vision. So scleritis needs to be treated as soon as you notice symptoms.

Treatment varies depending on the type of scleritis. Treatment can include:

- corticosteroid pills
- nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (like aspirin or ibuprofen) for pain and inflammation
- eye solutions or antibiotics
- immunosuppressive drugs (drugs that weaken the immune system) when the condition is severe

In severe cases, surgery may be needed. This can help repair the eye and stop further loss of vision.

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Sometimes scleritis is caused by another disorder within the body. That disease also needs treatment to control scleritis symptoms. Keep in mind that despite treatment, scleritis may come back. It's important to see your ophthalmologist and other specialists regularly to treat scleritis.

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

## Summary

Scleritis is inflammation (redness, swelling, pain) of the white part of the eye (the sclera). Scleritis is a serious condition that can lead to vision loss. It needs to be treated as soon as it is diagnosed. Treatment can include steroids, pills for pain, antibiotics, or surgery. Sometimes your ophthalmologist will work with a special doctor called a rheumatologist to help treat you.

If you have any questions about your vision, speak with your ophthalmologist. He or she is committed to protecting your sight.

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