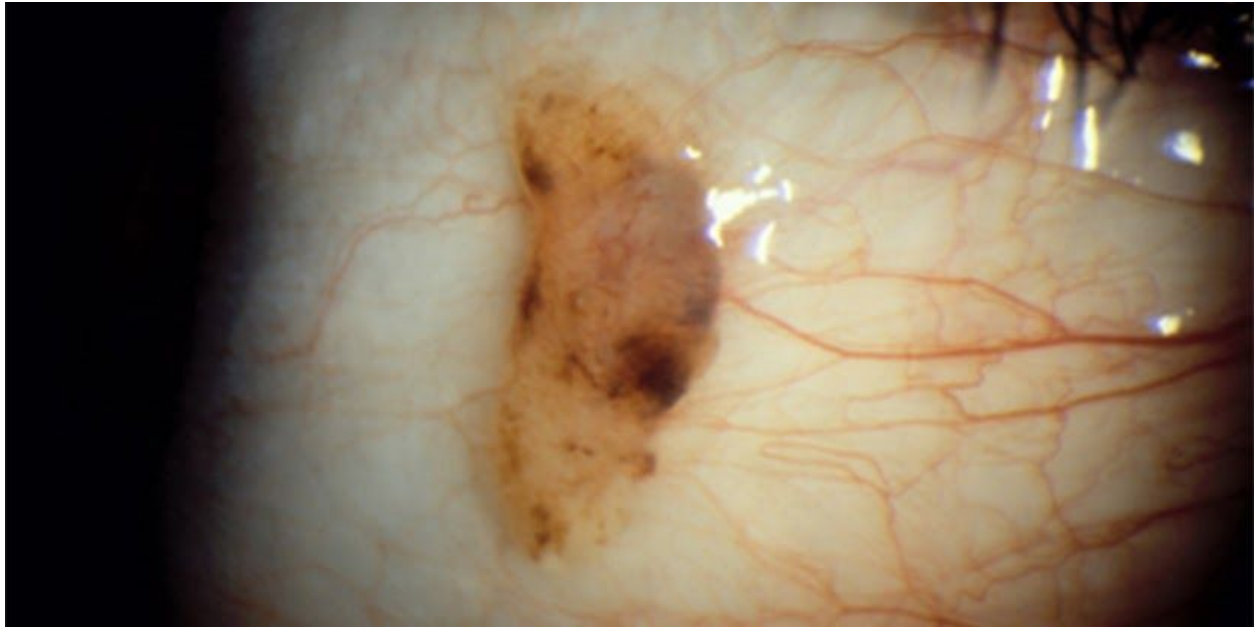


Nevus (Eye Freckle)



Written By: [Kierstan Boyd](#)

Reviewed By: [James M Huffman, MD](#)

Oct. 28, 2020

What Is a Nevus?

A nevus is a common, [colored growth on or in your eye](#). Sometimes called a freckle of the eye, it is similar to a mole on your skin. A nevus (plural: nevi) can be in the front of your eye, around the [iris](#), or under the [retina](#) at the back of the eye.

What Causes Nevi?

A nevus is made up of cells called melanocytes. These cells produce melanin, the pigment that colors our hair, skin and eyes. Most of the time, melanocytes are spread evenly throughout body tissue. Sometimes, though, these cells can clump together and form nevi.

People can be born with harmless eye nevi. A pigmented spot that develops later in life is usually harmless as well, but may have a greater risk of becoming [cancer](#).

An eye nevus needs to be watched regularly by an ophthalmologist because, like a skin mole, it could possibly develop into cancer of the eye.

There may be an association between [exposure to ultraviolet \(UV\) light](#) and developing nevi. [Wearing sunglasses that protect your eyes from UV light](#) is always recommended.

Nevus on the Outside of the Eye

A nevus or eye freckle that can be found on the outside of the eye include the following types:



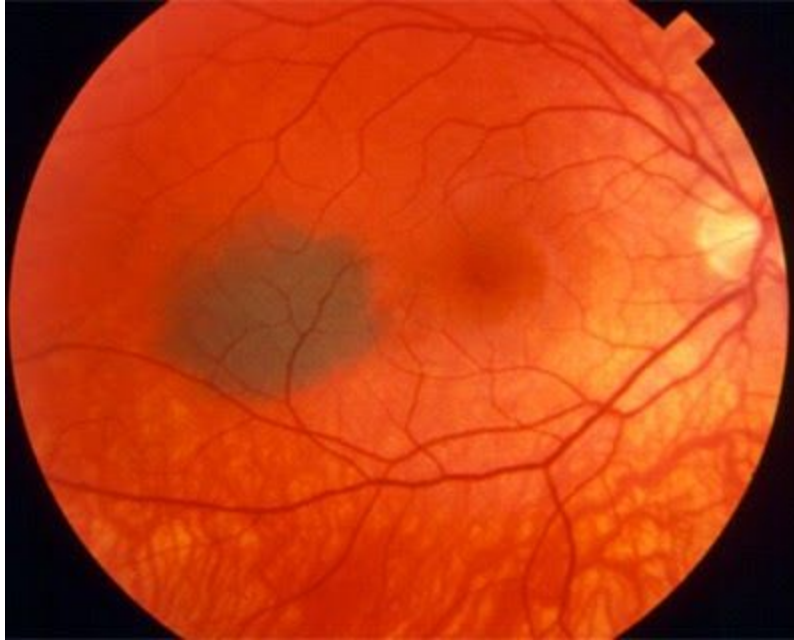
- **Conjunctival nevus.** A conjunctival nevus is a freckle or mole-like spot on the clear film ([conjunctiva](#)) covering your eyeball. This nevus is a very common type. It ranges from yellow to brown, and it can lighten or darken over time. It is usually not cancerous. However, your ophthalmologist will watch it over time, and if it grows larger, they may check it to see if it becomes a type of cancer called melanoma.



- **Iris freckles.** Iris freckles are tiny, dark brown flecks on the surface of the colored part of the eye (iris). Like skin freckles, they are caused by a buildup of melanin pigment. They are harmless and usually do not develop into melanoma.
- **Iris nevi.** Like iris freckles, iris nevi are dark spots on the colored iris. However, iris nevi are larger than iris freckles, and they grow down into a part of the iris called the stroma. Iris nevi grow larger with time. Like iris freckles, these nevi are usually benign (not cancerous). However, an ophthalmologist will monitor them over time for any changes.

You can see both iris freckles and iris nevi with the naked eye, but an ophthalmologist will do an eye exam to determine which type you have.

Choroidal Nevus: Nevus Inside the Eye



A nevus inside the eye is called a choroidal nevus. It is found under the retina in a layer of tissue called the [choroid](#). A choroidal nevus can only be seen during an eye exam. A choroidal nevus may be gray, yellow, brown or have multiple colors. Your ophthalmologist will check to see if it is raised, is orange colored, or is leaking fluid. Any of these findings means it could be or become a small choroidal [melanoma](#).

Nevus Diagnosis and Treatment

Nevus Diagnosis

Your ophthalmologist can find a [nevus](#) during a [routine eye exam](#). In some cases, your ophthalmologist may use imaging technology like [OCT](#) to examine a nevus more closely, such as a choroidal nevus.

The ophthalmologist will take a picture of the nevus. They will compare pictures over time to see if there are any changes in its size or shape.

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 regularly. Make sure to follow the exam schedule your ophthalmologist gives you.

Nevus Treatment

Most nevi do not need to be treated since they will not affect your vision or lead to any health problems. The only reason you might need treatment for a nevus is if your doctor suspects it might be melanoma.

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

Your ophthalmologist will not risk damaging your eye by removing a harmless nevus inside the eye. Your doctor will recommend treatment only if a nevus becomes cancerous. Treatment may involve radiation, surgery, laser therapy, or removal of the eye. Sometimes, waiting and watching the nevus closely is a treatment option. This is recommended when the side effects of cancer treatment can be more problematic than helpful.

When to See Your Eye Doctor About That Eye Freckle

You've noticed a spot that looks like a freckle in your eye. You don't feel anything unusual, and you are fairly certain it is not a problem. But you should get it checked by an ophthalmologist.

While it is most likely harmless, an ophthalmologist will want to examine and closely monitor the nevus to make sure it does not change. Changes mean the nevus could become cancer.

Other reasons to see an ophthalmologist include:

- You notice your eye freckle has grown or changed its shape or color
- You have [eye pain](#)
- You see [flashing lights](#)
- You notice other changes in your vision

Sources:

<https://www.aao.org/eye-health/diseases/what-is-nevus>

<https://www.aao.org/eye-health/diseases/nevus-treatment>