

# ALL ABOUT IRIS TUMORS

**Amy C. Schefler, MD, Ocular Oncology Specialist**

## **What is the iris?**

The iris (plural: irides) is a thin, circular organ within the eye which constricts (gets smaller) or dilates (gets bigger) in order to control the amount of light that reaches the retina. A patient's "eye color" is the color of the iris which can be blue, gray, green, hazel, brown, or any combination of these.

## **What type of masses occur in the iris?**

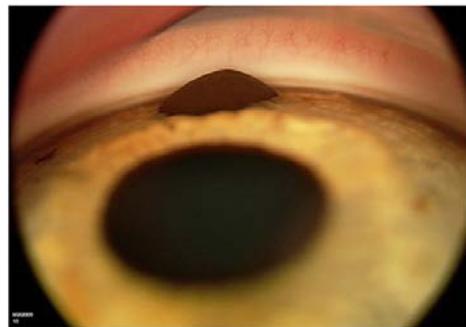
Different kinds of iris masses exist: benign growths such as cysts, freckles (known as nevi), growths of blood vessels, and others. Malignant tumors such as iris or iridociliary melanomas or metastases (cancers that spread to the iris from other parts of the body) can also develop.

**Iris nevi (freckles) are very common. Most people who have them:**

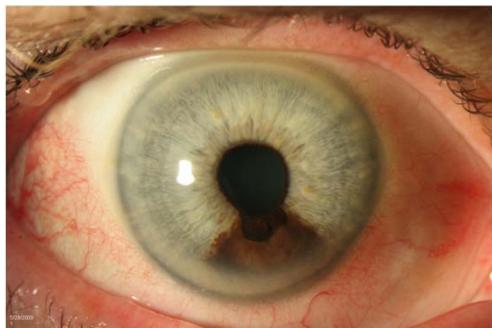
- Are Caucasian
- Are 40-60 years of age
- Have light eyes (blue, green, gray)



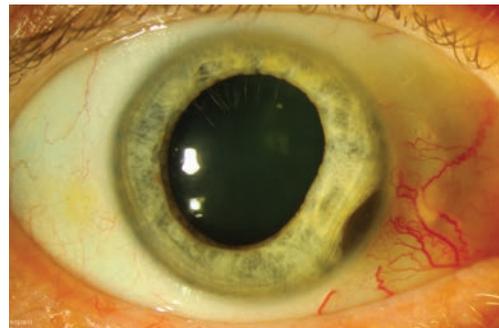
**Iris nevus (freckle)**



**Iris nevus in the anterior chamber angle, seen through a special mirrored lens**



**Iris nevus involving the margin of the pupil**



**Melanoma arising from the ciliary body (organ behind the iris) pushing the iris forward**

Iris freckles can be brown, yellow, or grayish in color. They can be small and flat or small and elevated. They sometimes have cysts (fluid-filled spaces) in them which can be detected on ultrasound.

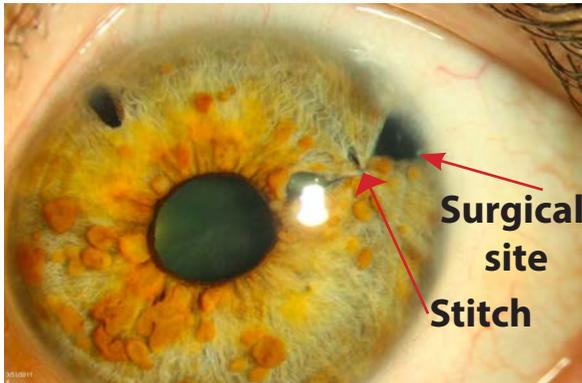
Most of the time, the freckles occur at the bottom half of the iris. Many of them never change or grow or some grow very slowly. Rarely, they can grow into an iris melanoma, a malignant tumor of the iris.

## **Do I need a biopsy?**

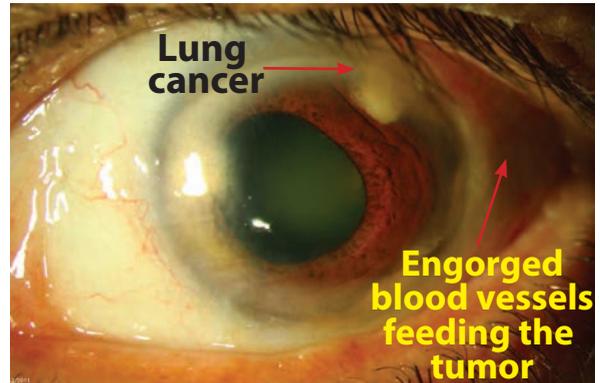
Biopsies are rarely required for iris tumors, as most of them can be diagnosed clinically with an ophthalmic exam, photos, ultrasound, and other forms of testing.

## **What type of treatment do I need?**

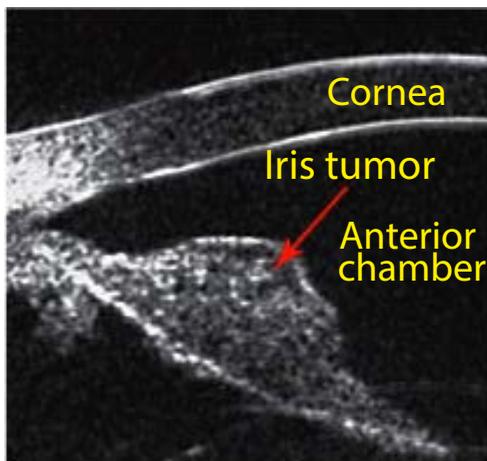
For most iris masses, observation alone is the initial treatment, as many of them stay stable or grow very slowly over time and do not require any treatment.



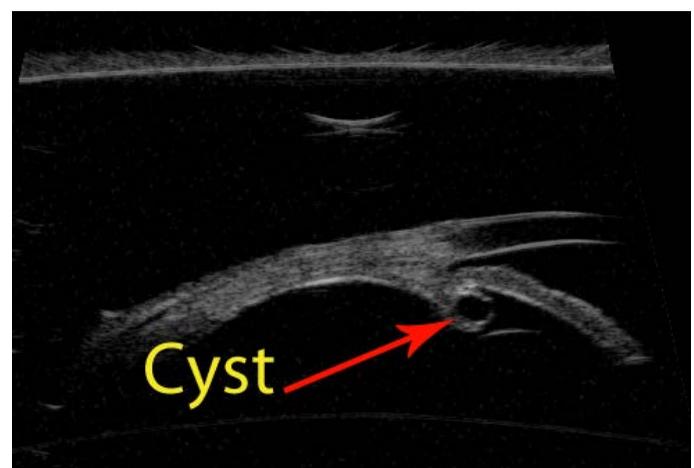
**Many iris freckles in a patient who had surgery to remove an iris melanoma**



**Fluffy white tissue invading the iris (lung cancer metastasis)**



**Ultrasound of Iris nevus**



## **What is the treatment for malignant tumors of the iris?**

For iris melanoma, a malignant tumor that arises from the iris itself, treatment consists of surgery to remove the tumor, radiation, or sometimes even just observation. Iris tumors tend to be small and grow much more slowly and metastasize less often than malignant tumors that arise from other parts of the eye.

Metastasis to the eye (cancer which arises in another part of the body and travels to the eye) are relatively rare and often regress when the underlying cancer is treated with systemic (intravenous) chemotherapy.

## **What are the side effects of surgery or radiation for an iris tumor?**

Side effects can include: dry eyes, cataracts, or a non-round pupil shape which is primarily a cosmetic issue.