Choroidal Naevus of the eye

What is this?

These are benign choroidal melanoma, referred to clinically as a choroidal nevus. They are just like the freckles you get on the skin and just like these are more common as one gets older. Around 2% of population have them commoner in whites 4% and less common in blacks 0.7%.

They appear as a flat or slightly elevated slate gray lesion at the back of the eye where the retina or seeing part of the eye is.

Fortunately they virtually never occur in the centre of the vision or the Macular area and thus never cause any interference with vision.

The margins are typically indistinct, and often there are overlying areas of drusen noted within the nevus. In most instances, choroidal nevi remain under two disc diameters (DD) in size (about 3mm), although they may attain sizes of up to 5 DD (7mm in some cases).

The only concern is if they grown and turn into a choroidal melanoma. They do this only very rarely but should be examined annually, with a photograph if possible, to ensure that any change is detected early.

Risk factors include:
- Light coloured iris – blue or grey
- Fair skin and propensity to easily sun burn
- Naevi and freckles on the skin

Distinguishing features between naevi and melanomas. Choroidal naevi tend to have clearly defined margins and to be flat or slightly elevated, and they remain stable in size. Over time, choroidal naevi display features such as overlying drusen as well as retinal pigment epithelial atrophy, hyperplasia or fibrous metaplasia.

In contrast, choroidal melanomas are more likely to show signs of activity such as relatively indiscrete margins, irregular or oblong configuration, overlying subretinal fluid and orange pigment, and abruptly elevated edges.

I have personally only seen one such case in my career. Studies vary in the risks one study quotes one case in over 8000 naevi, others quote 0.7% in the elderly, others as high as 10% over 10 years. However there are risk factors we look for.

- Naevi thickness > 2mm
- Naevi close to the optic disc <3mm
- Ultrasonaographic holoness
- Absent halo around the naevus
Subretinal fluid over the naevus on Optical Coherence Tomography.
Orange pigment
These are high risk factors.

An annual review is key.

Symptoms of change or growth are usually a shadow coming over the vision, or possibly an increase in floaters.

I think one of the best ways to monitor progress and assess the risk is with photography and Optical Coherence Tomography. Here one can accurately measure the size and height. This is an example of a large Naevus 5mm but only 0.2mm in height.

The most important thing is to ensure you have an annual review by your Optometrist or Ophthalmologist.

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with extracts from "Practical "Ophthalmology"