

IRIS MELANOSIS/MELANOMA

The iris is the colored part of the eye. In cats, an increased pigmented area of the iris may represent either a benign or malignant lesion. The two diagnoses that describe iris hyperpigmentation in cats are iris melanosis and iris melanoma.

Iris melanosis is a general term meaning progressive discoloration or hyperpigmentation of the iris. The pigmented area may be a small freckle, or the iris may have many diffuse discolored areas. Iris melanosis usually occurs in only one eye, but may occur in both eyes. Over time, the pigmented area often spreads to other parts of the iris. Iris melanosis may be a benign (harmless) condition, or it may cause secondary glaucoma if the pigmented area spreads and blocks the iridocorneal filtration angle.

In contrast to iris melanosis, iris melanoma refers to a malignant lesion of the iris. Melanoma lesions are more likely to be nodular and lumpy rather than diffuse and flat. If left untreated, the melanoma may remain unchanged, may spread to other parts of the iris, or may metastasize to other parts of the body and lead to fatal respiratory disease or liver failure. Aggressive treatment for iris melanoma involves complete removal of the eye. Conservative treatment for iris melanoma is similar to that for iris melanosis - periodic rechecks to watch for changes in the lesion and secondary complications.

Periodic rechecks of your pet are recommended to monitor the condition with the goal of preventing possible blinding secondary complications like glaucoma. Please call the practice if the affected eye looks enlarged, has a dilated pupil, or appears painful.