



Optic neuritis

What is Optic Neuritis (ON)?

Optic neuritis (ON) is an attack of inflammation (swelling) of the optic nerve. The optic nerve is important in sending information from the eye to the brain about what we are seeing. ON is caused by the body's immune system becoming mis-programmed and activating immune cells to attack the healthy myelin covering the optic nerve.

What causes Optic Neuritis (ON)?

We do not know exactly why this happens, sometimes it can follow on from a viral infection, but sometimes it can also just occur with no prior warning or trigger event.

What are the signs and symptoms of ON?

Optic neuritis can affect one or both eyes and the symptoms can include pain on moving the eye, blurred vision, loss of colour vision or even complete loss of vision.

How is it diagnosed?

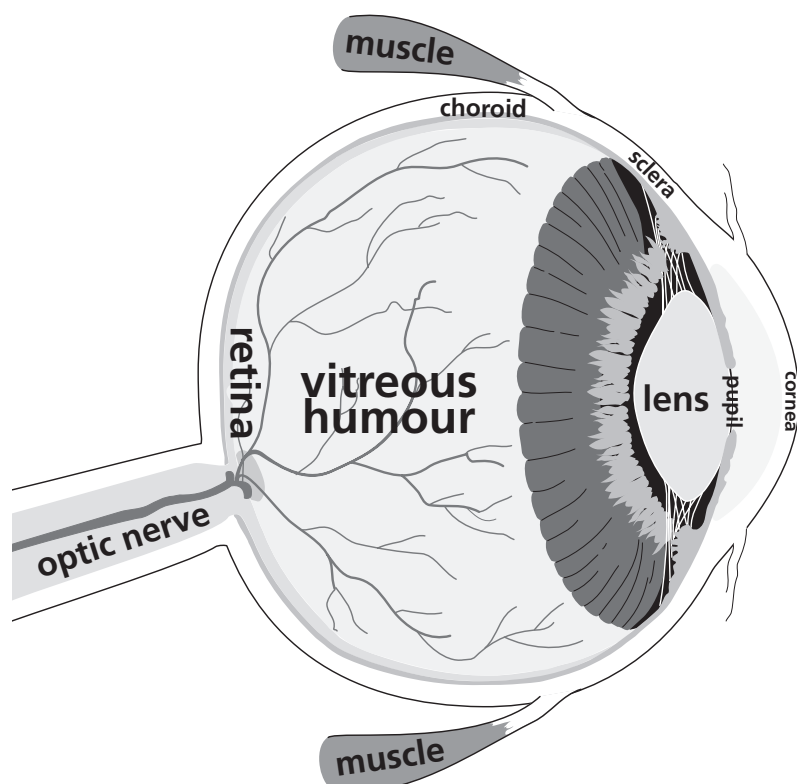
Normally a specialist eye doctor will examine the eye, and also request some specific eye tests. They may refer you for some blood tests and an MRI brain scan.

How is optic neuritis treated?

Steroids are given to reduce the inflammation around the optic nerves. They can be given into a vein (infusion) for three days or sometimes given by mouth (orally). Steroids shorten the duration of the symptoms, but they do not improve the long-term outcome.

What is the prognosis for ON?

For more than 80 per cent of young people, recovery is full, begins within days and continues for up to six months. Some people continue to have symptoms such as blurred or decreased vision.



Will my child go on to develop multiple sclerosis (MS)?

Optic neuritis, like MS, is a condition caused by the body's immune system becoming mis-programmed and attacking the myelin covering of the nerves. Whether your child is likely to go on to develop MS depends on the initial symptoms and also on whether the brain scan shows any specific inflammatory changes. Your doctor will be able to discuss this with you based on your child's specific presentation and the MRI scan. You may also be asked to help in research to enable us in time to answer these questions better.

What happens next?

You will be followed up by an eye doctor and you may, depending on the brain scan, be referred for further assessment.

Further information and support

There are several organisations in the UK offering support and advice about optic neuritis and life afterwards.

- The **MS Society** supports people affected by multiple sclerosis and other demyelinating disorders. Call their helpline on 0808 800 8000 or visit their website at www.mssociety.org.uk
- The **MS Trust** supports people with MS and also has information on optic neuritis. Call their helpline on 0800 0323 839 or visit their website at www.mstrust.org.uk
- The **British Trust for the Myelin Project** supports researchers and other people with an interest in demyelinating disorders. You can call them on 0161 292 3191 or visit their website at www.myelinproject.co.uk