Eye injuries - foreign body in the eye

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A foreign body is an object in your eye that shouldn’t be there, such as a speck of dust, a wood chip, a metal shaving, an insect or a piece of glass. The common places to find a foreign body are under the eyelid or on the surface of your eye. Those most at risk of getting a foreign body in the eye are tradespeople such as labourers, woodcutters, fitters and turners, and boilermakers. Don’t try to remove a foreign body from your eye yourself. Go straight to your doctor or the nearest hospital emergency department for help.

Symptoms of foreign bodies in eyes

Symptoms of a foreign body in the eye include:

- sharp pain in your eye followed by burning and irritation
- feeling that there is something in your eye
- watery and red eye
- scratchy feeling when blinking
- blurred vision or loss of vision in the affected eye
- sensitivity to bright lights
- bleeding into the white of the eye (subconjunctival haemorrhage).

Complications of foreign bodies in eyes

Most injuries from a foreign body in the eye are minor and usually heal without further problems given the right care. Possible complications include:

- infection and scarring – if the foreign body is not removed from your eye, it may lead to infection and scarring. For example, metal objects react with the eye’s natural tears and rust forms around the metal. This is seen as a dark spot on the cornea (the clear window at the front of the eye) and can cause a scar that may affect your vision. Once it is removed, symptoms should quickly ease
- corneal scratches or abrasions – a foreign body may scratch the cornea, which is the clear membrane on the front of the eye. Commonly, the foreign body is trapped under the upper eyelid. With the right care, most corneal abrasions – even large ones – heal within 48 hours. In some cases, however, they can lead to a long-term problem known as recurrent corneal erosion, which may occur even years after the original injury
- ulcer – sometimes a scratch on the cornea doesn’t heal. A defect on the surface of your eye (ulcer) may form in its place. This could affect your vision or lead to an abscess
- penetration of the eye – sometimes a projectile object can pierce the eye and enter the eyeball, causing serious injury and even blindness
- corneal scarring – this can cause some degree of permanent visual impairment.

Treatment of foreign bodies in eyes

Medical treatment generally includes:

- The doctor or nurse checks your vision.
- Once they find the foreign body, they gently remove it after numbing the eye with anaesthetic eye drops. If it is central or deep, they will arrange for you to see an ophthalmologist (specialist eye doctor) to have it removed.
- Your eye may be washed with saline (sterile salt water) to flush out any dust and dirt.
- X-rays may be done to check whether an object has entered your eyeball or orbit.
- Your eye may be patched to allow it to rest and any scratches to heal.
- You will be advised not drive until the eye patch is removed and your vision has returned to normal.
- Your doctor will want to see you again to check that your eye is healing and that your vision is all right. You should not miss this appointment. Even though you may feel better, your eye may not have fully healed. The follow-up is needed to make sure the treatment is working.
- If there are any serious problems, or a residual rust ring, you will be sent to an ophthalmologist.

Eye drops and ointments

General suggestions on how to use eye drops and ointments include:

- Wash your hands before touching your eyes.
- Rest your finger on your cheek and pull down the lower eyelid.
- Tilt your head back and drop the liquid in behind your lower eyelid.
• For ointment, smear a small amount along the inside of the lower eyelid. Make sure that the nozzle doesn’t touch the eye. Generally drops are used during the day and ointment at night.
• Continue with the treatment until your eyes have healed.
• Store all drops and ointments as instructed on the box or container and keep them out of reach of children.
• Some drops contain drugs or preservatives that damage contact lenses. Do not wear contact lenses until instructed by your doctor.

When to seek urgent medical help for foreign bodies in eyes

See your doctor or go to the emergency department of your nearest hospital if:
• you still have marked pain and watering after the object has been removed
• your vision is blurry when you take the patch off, or there are other vision changes such as blind spots or seeing ‘stars’
• clear or bloody fluid is coming from your eyeball
• you are concerned for any other reason.

Self-care at home after treatment for foreign bodies in eyes

Be guided by your doctor, but suggestions include:
• Don’t drive with an eye patch on – it can be very difficult to judge distances properly.
• You may take the patch off – usually the next day, or as instructed by your doctor.
• If you have some discomfort in the eye, you can take pain-relieving medication that contains paracetamol or ibuprofen. Follow the instructions on the packet carefully.
• Avoid working with machinery or at heights.
• You may be advised to use drops or ointment to stop infection. Follow your doctor’s advice as to how often to put them in. You will need to continue the treatment until your eye has healed.

Prevention of foreign bodies in eyes

The best way to prevent a foreign body from getting in your eye is to protect your eyes. Suggestions include:
• Always wear safety glasses when working in dusty or windy areas, and especially when working in a place where flying debris is likely.
• Use safety glasses or goggles with close-fitting side shields. Regular sunglasses or corrective glasses are not enough.
• Don’t stand or walk near anyone who is grinding or drilling.
• Wear safety glasses when playing some sports such as tennis or squash.

Where to get help

• In an emergency, call triple zero (000)
• Emergency department of your nearest hospital
• Your doctor
• Ophthalmologist
• Your manager or supervisor
• Your elected occupational health and safety (OH&S) representative and your workplace OH&S coordinator
• WorkSafe Victoria, Tel. (03) 9641 1555 or 1800 136 089 (toll free) – for general enquiries
• WorkSafe Victoria Emergency Response Line Tel. 13 23 60 – to report serious workplace emergencies (24 hours, 7 days)

References
• Acute eye injuries in children, Royal Children’s Hospital, Melbourne.

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More information

Eyes

The following content is displayed as Tabs. Once you have activated a link navigate to the end of the list to view its associated content. The activated link is defined as Active Tab

- Eye basics
- Eye injuries and irritations
- Eye conditions
- Vision change and loss
- Vision aids and treatment
- Living with vision loss

Eye basics

- 10 tips for good eye health

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Most vision problems are avoidable or can be treated so have your eyes regularly checked by an optometrist or other eye care health professional.

- **Eye care - optometrists**
  A standard eye examination with an optometrist includes a screening for all common eye diseases, such as glaucoma and cataracts.

- **Eye care - orthoptists**
  Orthoptists assist in the diagnosis and treatment of eye disease.

- **Eye safety at work**
  Wearing eye protection appropriate for the task can significantly reduce the risk of injury.

- **Eyes - common problems**
  You can help prevent dry eyes and minimise the risk of tired or sore eyes while reading or using a computer.

- **Eyes explained**
  The eye's complicated design means that an image can pass through its many layers and end up crisply focused on the retina.

- **Eye tests**
  Regular eye tests or check-ups detect problems early, so you can have early treatment to minimise any permanent damage to your eyes.

- **Short-sightedness**
  If you are short-sighted, you will have trouble seeing objects clearly in the distance and they will appear blurry.

- **Smoking and eye disease**
  Smoking is thought to be a factor in age-related macular degeneration and blindness.

### Eye injuries and irritations

- **Dry eye**
  A person suffering from dry eye syndrome does not have enough of the right kind of tears to keep the eye comfortable.

- **Eye floaters**
  Some eye floaters look like small dots, while others appear like threads or little hairy clumps.

- **Eye injuries - chemical burns**
  Always wear safety goggles or a face shield when handling liquid or powder chemicals.

- **Eye injuries - foreign body in the eye**
  Don't try to remove a foreign body from your eye - go to your doctor or hospital emergency department for help.

- **Eyes - blocked tear duct**
  Some babies are born with a blocked tear duct, but other events, including infection and trauma to the nose, can cause a blocked tear duct.

- **Eyes - flash burns**
  Flash burns are like sunburn in the eye and can affect both your eyes. Find out more.

### Eye conditions

- **Blepharospasm**
  Blepharospasm means involuntary twitching, blinking, closure or squeezing of the eyelids.

- **Cataracts**
  A cataract of the eye is like the lens of a camera becoming fogged up.

- **Colour blindness**
  People who are colourblind can't see some colours or see them differently from other people. Colour blindness is inherited, and affects more boys than girls. Out of 20 boys, it is likely that one or...

- **Conjunctivitis**
  Conjunctivitis is an eye infection caused by a bacteria or virus. Symptoms include eye redness, a discharge and swollen lids. Conjunctivitis is treated with antibacterial eye drops or ointment.

- **Diabetic retinopathy**

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Without treatment, diabetic retinopathy can cause loss of vision and blindness.

Eyes - giant cell arteritis
Giant cell arteritis is inflammation of the arteries that can cause sudden blindness in one or both eyes.

Eyes - glaucoma
Glaucoma can happen at any age and without early detection can lead to permanent vision loss and blindness.

Eyes - optic neuritis
Optic neuritis is inflammation of the optic nerve that causes blurred, grey and dim vision.

Eyes - retinitis pigmentosa
Retinitis pigmentosa is the collective name for a range of diseases that damage the retina and cause vision to fade.

Eyes - trachoma
A clean face and clean environment are the best protection against trachoma.

Eyes - uveitis
Iritis can cause vision problems if it is not treated.

Pterygium
A pterygium is a fleshy overgrowth of the conjunctiva that may affect one or both eyes.

Retinal detachment
If a detached retina is not treated, it can lead to total blindness.

Vision change and loss

Eyes - age-related macular degeneration
Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is a type of vision loss where there is a distortion or absence of the central field of vision.

Eyes – long-sightedness
A significant amount of long-sightedness can lead to blurred vision, particularly for close objects.

Eyes – refractive errors
Refractive errors are common eye disorders causing blurry vision and are related to the focusing ability of your eyes.

Short-sightedness
If you are short-sighted, you will have trouble seeing objects clearly in the distance and they will appear blurry.

Vision loss - neurological
Neurological vision impairment (ABI VI) is vision loss caused by damage to the areas of the brain that are responsible for sight.

Vision aids and treatment

Corneal transplantation and donation
Corneal transplant surgery would not be possible without generous donors and their families, who have donated corneal tissue so that others may see.

Eyes - contact lenses
Proper care of your contact lenses will help avoid irritation or damage to your eyes.

Eyes - laser eye surgery
During laser eye surgery, a computer-controlled laser is used to remove microscopic amounts of tissue from the front surface of the eye.

Vision therapy
Vision therapy is effective for everyone; however, its impact is greatest in children and young adults.

Living with vision loss

Braille
Braille is a reading and writing system for blind and vision impaired people, made up of raised dots that can be "read" by touch.

Vision loss and sport
Many sports can be adapted to suit people who are blind or have low vision.

- **Vision loss - living with a guide dog**
  Guide dogs are intelligent animals that thrive on the challenge of helping their handlers.

- **Vision loss - occupational therapy**
  Occupational therapy for people with vision impairment offers new strategies and alternative ways to do things.

- **Vision loss - offering assistance**
  When you meet a person who is blind or has low vision, ask them if they want help.

- **Vision loss - recreational activities**
  Many recreational activities can be reworked to suit a person who is blind or has low vision.

- **Vision loss - safety around the home**
  There are many ways to improve home safety for people whose vision is deteriorating.

- **Vision loss - social events**
  With planning and preparation, most social events can be adapted to suit people with vision loss.

- **Vision loss - training guide dogs**
  Guide dogs are specially bred and trained to enable people who are blind or vision impaired to achieve freedom and independence.

### Related Information

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**Related information on other websites**

- KidsHealth - Eye Injuries
- NEVTDIP
- RANZCO
- Worksafe Victoria

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Last updated: June 2017

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