Ouch — I have a scratched cornea! [1]

Hey Alice,

How do I treat a scratch on my eyeball?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Ouch! Scratches on the cornea, the clear outer layer of the eyeball, may be quite painful. While it may heal on its own, seeing a health care provider can help prevent infection and if needed, provide necessary treatment.

Eyeball scratches, also called corneal abrasions, may have a number of causes:

- Damaged or badly fitted contact lenses
- Improper sterilization or leaving a contact lens in for too long
- Tiny objects and bits of debris, such as dirt, insects, or sand
- Larger foreign objects, such as fingernails, toys, sheets of paper, sports gear, combs, or tree branches

This injury to the eye could also result in tearing, redness, blurred vision, sensitivity to light, or increased involuntary blinking.

Corneal abrasions usually heal quickly (within a few days) and are generally simple to manage. A health care provider or ophthalmologist (a medical doctor trained to provide eye care and surgery) may first use fluorescent-staining eye drops and a special light to look for scratches. After examining you, they might remove any foreign objects remaining in the eye and prescribe treatments, including antibiotic eye drops or ointment to prevent infection and medicine to control pupil dilation. They may also recommend acetaminophen or ibuprofen for pain. Although some of these options may be available over-the-counter, it's still wise to seek medical care rather than trying to treat yourself. Your provider might also suggest wearing sunglasses with ultraviolet (UV) light protection, or using an eye-patch, if that is preferred, to help minimize any discomfort while the cornea heals.
If left untreated, eye injuries may become seriously infected and could threaten your vision. Until you get yourself checked out, it's wise to avoid the activity that caused the abrasion. If you think your eye is hurting from a contact lens, it's recommended not to put the lens in again until a health care provider suggests it's okay to do so. If you think it might be a small piece of dust or debris, you could try flushing your eye with lots of water. If no water is immediately available to you, you may consider moving your upper eyelid over your lower eyelid to stimulate the release of tears to flush your eye out.

If this information has opened your eyes to a new interest in optimal ocular health in general, you might be interested in taking a peek at the National Eye Institute [2], part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

Here's lookin' at you,

Alice!

Category:
General Health [3]
Eyes [4]

Related questions

What can I do for the stye on my eye? [5]
Is it okay to sleep with my contact lenses? [6]
Floating eye spots [7]
Staring at the computer all day... okay for my eyes? [8]
Are darker sunglasses worse for your eyes? [9]

Resources

Medical Services (Morningside) [10]
Medical Services (CUIMC) [11]

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