

Corneal Abrasions and Foreign Bodies

If you require this information in an alternative language or format (such as Braille, audiotape or large print), please ask the staff who are looking after you.

What is a corneal abrasion?

A corneal abrasion is a scratch on the clear dome-shaped window at the front of your eye, the cornea. The scratch may be caused by being poked in the eye by something or by a small fragment of material going into the eye and becoming embedded in the cornea (a foreign body).

What are the symptoms?

- Eye pain: this part of the eye is supplied by lots of nerves which make it extremely sensitive. The severity of pain depends on the size of the abrasion
- Blurred vision
- Red eye
- Sensitivity to light
- Watering eye
- Eyelids may become swollen
- A history of sustaining a foreign body to the eye eg a welding flash

What causes a corneal abrasion?

Accidental scratches to the cornea are very common. The cornea can be scratched by anything, from a hairbrush or a fingernail to a tree branch.

It is possible for the cornea to be scratched if you have a foreign body in the eye such as a dust particle. Occasionally a small foreign body can become lodged under the upper eyelid and cause repeated scratches on

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your cornea. Once any foreign body is removed you will be left with the scratch it caused.

What is the treatment?

1. Removal of any foreign body: the health care professional will apply numbing eye drops and remove any corneal foreign body
2. Antibiotic ointment: infection can develop in the scratched area so an antibiotic ointment is given for several days to prevent this. It also acts as a lubricant to help keep the eye comfortable
3. Dilating eye drops: you may be prescribed a drop which dilates your pupil. This may help to relieve painful spasms of your iris (the coloured part of the eye). This eyedrop will make your vision more blurred whilst you are using it. Vision will normalise when this drop is stopped.
4. An eye pad: occasionally an eye pad may be applied for several hours
5. Painkillers: such as paracetamol and ibuprofen can be used to help with the pain.

Most corneal abrasions heal on their own within 24 to 48 hours and the pain will begin to wear off. Your eye may feel gritty for several weeks.

Numbing drops are used by the doctor to examine your eye. These provide brief relief but the pain will come back within 20-60 minutes afterwards. Unfortunately, we cannot prescribe numbing drops for you to go home with as they delay healing of the cornea and may cause other problems.

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Further advice

- Sunglasses may be worn to help reduce sensitivity to light
- Avoid rubbing or touching your eye
- You may also be advised to use lubricating ointment or drops to keep your eye moist while it heals
- If you are a contact lens wearer, do not use your contact lenses until your eye is completely healed. This may be between 2 to 4 weeks. You may wish to visit your optician for a contact lens fit and use check before continuing with wear.
- Wear protective eyewear to prevent future foreign bodies or ocular injury

Complications

The connecting bridges which normally hold the cells of the cornea together at a microscopic level take a long time, at least six months to reform. During this time the area of the scratch is vulnerable to further injury. If the eye dries out overnight, on waking the eyelid can lift the top layer of cornea off again. This causes sharp pain in the eye, usually in the morning, and a feeling like the abrasion has returned. This is called Recurrent corneal erosion syndrome and requires further management.

When to seek advice

Most cases of corneal abrasion do not need to attend for a further check-up.

Contact the eye clinic if:

- Your vision becomes more blurred
- The pain and redness are getting a lot worse

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How do I contact the hospital?

If you require advice please telephone the Ophthalmic Outpatient Department between 9am – 5pm Monday to Friday on 01423 542217.

Further Information

Other sources of useful information can be found at:

NHS www.nhs.co.uk

Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust website www.hdft.nhs.uk

National Eye Institute <http://www.nei.nih.gov/health/>

Feedback

If you have a concern, complaint or compliment, or would like to provide feedback regarding your experience of the Ophthalmology Service / clinic, please contact the Patient Experience Team via the following:

Patient Experience helpline 01423 555499 (Monday – Friday 9.30am – 4pm)

E-mail: hdft.patientexperience@nhs.net

Department of
Ophthalmology
Harrogate District Hospital
Lancaster Park Road
Harrogate HG2 7SX
01423 885959
Direct line: 01423 553195
www.hdft.nhs.uk