

Healthy eyes in the home

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The different structures, such as the top and bottom eye lids, the eye lashes, the sensitive transparent surface, called the cornea, and the white of the eye covered by the conjunctiva and blood vessels can all be affected by simple mistakes.

The important question is what can be dealt with at home and what needs optometric or medical attention?

Let us look at the various activities, what may lead to eye accidents, and how to deal with the resulting traumas at home.

Cooking

Cooking with strong substances, such as chillies, can easily get from fingers to the eyes by a simple touch. This will cause a red eye reaction, accompanied by stinging and watering.

The contamination of the tears by a food product needs to be diluted so lots of cold water or a sterile solution should be used until the stinging sensation begins to cease.

It is possible to have an allergic reaction to make-up, skin creams, contact lens solutions and anything else that comes close to or in the eyes on a regular basis.

Cleaning

Getting bleach or household cleaner in the eyes gives rise to a chemical burn. The eye should be immediately flooded with large quantities of sterile water or by using an eye wash. If not available then cold running water should be used, preferably from the rising mains, using a cup or shower-head.

Tilt the head with the injured eye downwards so the water runs from the inside outwards. Keep the eyelids apart with the fingers. When all the traces of the chemical seem to have been removed, lightly cover the eye with a clean pad and, taking the substance with you, seek help at Accident and Emergency. However dangerous the substance, acid or corrosive, 10 minutes really thorough irrigation will have done all the good it can.

Do not use chemical antidotes since the heat generated by the reaction may increase the degree of injury.

A bang to the eye

If a minor eyelid cut is bleeding, apply direct pressure with a clean, dry cloth until the bleeding subsides. Clean the cut with boiled cooled water, cover with a clean dressing and place a cold compress on the dressing to reduce pain and swelling. If it is a major eyelid cut or the actual eye is lacerated, cover the injured eye with a clean pad and hold lightly in place with a bandage. Apply no pressure. Cover the other eye to stop movement of the eyeball and go to

PAINTING AND DECORATING



A foreign body in the eye will cause a watering, red eye that is very uncomfortable, especially on blinking. This can be due to decorating material or specks of dirt floating on the white of the eye or inside the lid, and these may be removed at home.

If the particle can be seen on the white of the eye or inside the lower lid, pick it off using the moistened corner of a clean tissue or cotton-tipped bud. If you cannot see the particle, pull the upper lid down over the lower lid and hold it for a moment. This may dislodge the particle. If the particle remains, it may be on the inside of the upper lid. If you are alone, seek help from an optometrist or hospital eye department.

However, another person may be able to remove the foreign body for you. The sufferer needs to look down. The lashes of the top lid are pulled down gently and a match, cocktail stick or cotton wool bud placed over the upper lid about half way and the lid folded back over the stick. If the particle is now visible, carefully pick it off with a clean, wet corner of a tissue or wet cotton wool bud and unfold the lid. You could also try to wash the particle out of the eye using cold water or a prepared eye wash. If the foreign body cannot be dislodged, washed out, or the lid turned, use a soothing drop to make the surface more comfortable, and consult an optometrist.

Accident and Emergency immediately.

If there is a blow to the eye area, use a cold compress instead of a dry pad over the eye. If the trauma causes a blood vessel on the white of the eye to haemorrhage, it is important to check the vision in the eye is not reduced. If everything else seems normal, then the conjunctival haemorrhage can be left to resolve, which may take up to 10 days.

Using a natural witch hazel drop can make the eye more comfortable, but no real treatment is needed as long as no other problem is experienced. Any change to central or surrounding vision with flashes of light or increased floaters should be immediately investigated by an optometrist or eye department as it may indicate a retinal detachment.

The most serious blow is a foreign body that has entered the eyeball itself, which needs immediate medical help from an Eye Accident and Emergency. A fall or blow to the eye may have damaged the eye itself, causing symptoms of visual loss. This needs urgent medical treatment.

Allergic reaction

It is possible to have an allergic reaction to make-up, skin creams, contact lens solutions and anything else that comes close to or in the eyes on a regular basis. Try a treatment for itchy, allergic eyes containing the active ingredient Sodium Cromoglycate, which works by blocking the release of histamines. Use the drops throughout the summer season when incidence of allergy and hay fever eyes are at their greatest. If the lids and conjunctiva swell, a cooling eye mask may help to calm down the situation.

Tips to prevent eye accidents

When doing anything that involves using chemicals, foods or getting particles on the fingers, don't touch the eyes before thorough hand-washing. It is very easy for any substance to move from the fingers to the eyes with even a gentle touch of contaminated finger or hand, and will cause an unwanted reaction.

After trauma, any immediate change to vision or blurring which continues following some form of home treatment should be investigated by either an optometrist, if unsure about the reduction in vision, or a hospital Accident and Emergency department if vision has reduced dramatically.

Swimming

Eyes can become red and sore from chlorinated pools. This also indicate there has been some minor cell damage to the cornea. The best way of dealing with this is to flood the eyes with soothing drops to dilute the chlorine and also make the surface of the eye more comfortable by encouraging a thick stable tear film layer.

Soft contact lens wearers should not swim in their lenses. If it is necessary, as otherwise vision is difficult, then one-day disposables are better than re-useable lenses. However, the chlorine will make the lenses tighten on the eyes. If the eyes look red on getting out the pool, the lenses should not be removed immediately as otherwise they will take some corneal tissue cells with them, which will cause more discomfort or pain and make the eye more susceptible to infection. It is best to allow about 30 minutes to pass. Then use re-wetting drops, which will help to loosen the lenses.

Extended watching of TV/ PC

Prolonged use of the computer is bad for encouraging a person to stare and reduces their blink rate. Depending on the state of the person's tear film, after a short or long time, this will result in sore, dry eyes. It is important to blink routinely; the norm is 12 blinks per minute. It is also important, at work, to take short breaks.

Hazards caused by children or pets

It is not uncommon to be struck in the eye by a playful child or pet, especially with the fingernail. Depending on the size of the abrasion, if it is large, the accompanying discomfort will be pain. In this circumstance, the eye needs medical treatment to encourage healing and limit an infection. Therefore, an Accident and Emergency visit is necessary for ointment and patching.

If discomfort is mild and not getting worse after an hour or two, it is best to use a soothing drop. This will give a thick stable tear layer so that the cornea can heal more quickly by being cushioned from the continual close rubbing by the eyelid on blinking. If the eye starts to feel worse after an hour or two then it may have become infected so medical attention is needed.

Car maintenance

It would be best to use goggles for this pursuit. As the potential of metal or rusted foreign bodies is high. Never attempt to remove an object embedded in the actual eyeball, or a chip of metal embedded in the centre of the cornea in front of the pupil. The problem with a piece of metal or rust is that these foreign bodies can rust into the corneal tissue and cause a residual scar. In any of these cases, cover both eyes, as described for cuts to the eye or eyelid, and seek medical help. If the foreign body is up under the top eyelid, it will cause the eye to be very difficult to open, even though no visible piece will be seen. In these circumstances a trip to the optometrist or Accident and Emergency is necessary.



Complaints that can be dealt with at home

- * Cooking substances, such as ingredients in the eye
- * Sore, gritty eyes
- * Small foreign body on white of eye
- * Pollen exposure
- * Mild gardening abrasion
- * Barbeque smoke irritation
- * Chlorinated pool irritation
- * Insect bite to eyelid
- * Prolonged TV or PC use
- * Conjunctival haemorrhage (red eyes from a burst blood vessel)

Complaints that need referral to a doctor

- * Corrosive cleaners, such as bleach, oven cleaners in the eye
- * Garden or insect sprays
- * Scratched or torn eyeball or eyelid
- * Moving or stationary object trauma causing a drop in vision i.e. walking into a door, being elbowed into the eye
- * Foreign object embedded under the top eyelid
- * Metal foreign object stuck on the cornea
- * Foreign object within pupil area
- * Thorny branch scratch of the cornea
- * Hobby materials contamination i.e. super glue in the eye
- * Insect bite to cornea