

Corneal Abrasion

What is a corneal abrasion?

A corneal abrasion is a scratch on the cornea, the clear dome on the front of the eye.

What are the symptoms of corneal abrasion?

A corneal abrasion is very painful because there are many nerves in this part of the eye. With a corneal abrasion

- Your eye is often watery, red and sensitive to light
- Your eyelids may become swollen
- Your vision may be blurry

What causes a corneal abrasion?

Scratches to the cornea are common. The cornea could be scratched by a hairbrush, a fingernail or a tree branch. It may be scratched when a small object such as a dust particle hits your eye. Scratches may also occur if a small foreign body becomes lodged under your eyelid.

What treatments are available for corneal abrasion?

The following treatments may be recommended:

- antibiotic eye drops or ointment – to prevent any infection which could develop following a scratch to the cornea. Your doctor will instruct you on how long you need to use the drops or ointment for
- an eye pad may be applied for several hours to keep the eye closed – this allows the cornea to heal without being interrupted by blinking
- lubricants at night – to prevent the eyelid from sticking to the cornea while sleeping and tearing the healing eye skin. These lubricants may need to be continued for several weeks
- pupil dilating drops to enlarge the pupil and help to relieve pain. Vision is blurred for at least 12 hours after the drops have been used
- If you are able to take over the counter painkillers such as paracetamol or ibuprofen, these can be taken to help with the pain

General advice

- sunglasses may help reduce light sensitivity
- avoid rubbing or touching your eye
- do not drive if you have been given eye drops that could blur your vision, or if you are given an eye pad
- if you wear contact lenses, please do not use them until your eye is completely healed

What happens if I do not get treatment?

The eye can be very painful, but in most cases the cornea heals and all symptoms pass. In some cases, inflammation and infection can occur if left untreated and may cause permanent damage.

Can there be any permanent damage?

Provided the abrasion is superficial and there is no secondary infection, most corneal abrasions heal quickly, and vision returns completely.

In a small number of cases although the skin over the cornea heals it does not bind down entirely and can stick to the eyelid at night and rip when waking and opening the eyes or when the eyes move rapidly while dreaming. This is called Recurrent Corneal Erosion Syndrome and may require the prolonged use of lubricant eye ointments and occasionally laser surgery. If such symptoms occur please seek medical advice.

When to seek advice?

In most cases, you will not need to return for a further check-up.

However, should you experience any of the following please contact your consultant immediately.

- your eyesight becomes more blurred over time
- the pain and redness in your eyes continues to worsen
- you wake up in the morning with a feeling that the discomfort has returned even though you have been free from the corneal abrasion pain for weeks or months