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, can be quite painful. This injury to the eye can also result in tearing, redness, blurred vision, sensitivity to light, and/or increased involuntary eye blinking. Eyeball scratches, also called corneal abrasions, can be caused by a number of things:

- Damaged or badly fitted contact lenses, as well as improper sterilization and leaving a 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, balls and other sports gear, combs, or tree branches

It's important to see a health care provider or ophthalmologist as soon as possible after receiving a corneal abrasion, preferably within 24 hours, since untreated eye injuries can become seriously infected and may threaten your vision. Until you get yourself checked out, avoid the activity that caused the abrasion. If you think your eye's hurting from a contact lens, don't put the lens in again until a health care provider says it's okay to do so.

With the right treatment, corneal abrasions usually heal quickly, within 1 to 3 days, and are generally easy to deal with. A health care provider or ophthalmologist may first use harmless, fluorescent-staining eye drops and a special light to look for scratches. After examining you, s/he can remove any foreign objects remaining in the eye and prescribe treatments, including:

- Antibiotic eye drops or ointment to prevent infection
- Medicine to dilate the pupil and promote healing
- A temporary eye-patch to shield the cornea and minimize irritation

While some of these treatments may be available over-the-counter, make sure you see a health-care provider or eye-expert rather than attempt to treat yourself. The health care provider might also suggest wearing sunglasses with ultraviolet (UV) light protection, to help minimize any discomfort while the cornea heals and/or to cover an eye-patch, if this is
preferred.

For more information on eye health, take a peek at the National Eye Institute [2], part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

Here's lookin' at you,

Alice!

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Published date:
 Jul 25, 2003

Last reviewed on:
 May 07, 2015

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