

DESCRIPTION

The cornea is the thin, clear, frontal part of the eye that covers the iris (colored part) and the sclera (white part). An abrasion is a worn-off, scratched, or scraped area of the cornea. An ulcer is an open sore of the cornea. They both can affect people of any age.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Eye pain that may be severe.
- Eyes are sensitive to bright light.
- Feeling as if something is in the eye.
- Watering of the eye.
- Blurred vision.
- Redness in the white of the eye.
- Discharge from the eye.
- Clouding of the cornea.

CAUSES

- Corneal abrasion usually occurs from some type of injury to the eye. It may be a direct injury by a pencil, staple, pin, fingernail, or other object. It may be due to particles flying in the air, such as sand, dust, or from woodworking.
- Corneal ulcer usually occurs when the cornea has been injured and germs enter the injured area and cause an infection. The germs may be viral, bacterial, fungal, or may be a parasitic infection.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Contact lens wear.
- Recent eye infection or injury, or general infection.
- Severely dry eyes (lack of tearing).
- Small children playing with pointed objects.
- Athletes playing sports without using eye protection.
- Work or hobbies that use pointed tools or produce dust.
- Weak immune system, such as with HIV.
- Severe allergies.
- Eyelids that do not close completely.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Wear safety goggles or protective eye gear when using power tools or when participating in certain sports activities.
- Wash hands often to prevent the spread of germs, handle contact lenses properly and avoid touching the eye if you are sick.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Abrasions are usually mild and heal on their own in a few days. Corneal ulcers are a more serious eye problem, but should heal in 2 to 3 weeks with treatment. Complications may include scarring of the cornea, which can result in vision impairment.

GENERAL MEASURES

- Usually, an eye doctor (ophthalmologist) will examine the eye using a slit lamp (an eye microscope). A yellow dye may be used in the eye to make it easier to see the affected area. Medical tests may include a vision test and a culture study of corneal scraping.
- Treatment will depend on the underlying cause. This may involve removing any foreign object in the eye and drug treatment for the eye. Rarely, hospital care may be needed for severe ulcers.
- An eye patch may be used for a short time with an abrasion.
- Apply cool-water compresses to the eye as often as they feel good.
- Wear sunglasses. They may help relieve pain.
- If corneal ulcers cause scarring that affects vision, a corneal transplant may be needed.

MEDICATIONS

- Eye drops or ointments for an eye infection will may prescribed.
- For minor pain, you may use nonprescription medications such as acetaminophen and ibuprofen.
- Stronger pain medications may be prescribed if needed.
- A tetanus shot may be needed if it is not up to date.

ACTIVITY

Resting your eyes will help with healing. Limit your reading. Don't drive until you have medical approval.

SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION IF:

- After diagnosis, eye pain becomes more severe, vision changes (blurring or loss of vision), or eye becomes red.