

# Corneal abrasion (scratch or graze to the cornea)

Accident and emergency

Patient information

## What is a corneal abrasion?

The cornea is the clear, dome-shaped structure at the front of the eye. A corneal abrasion is a small scratch or graze to the cornea.

## What are the signs and symptoms?

- History of eye trauma
- Red, painful eye
- Watering eye
- Blurred vision
- A foreign body sensation (a feeling that something is in your eye).

## How is it diagnosed?

The diagnosis is usually confirmed by a doctor who examines the cornea with a retinoscope or slit lamp.

A drop of anaesthetic may be given to make the examination more comfortable although this is not always the case.

A small amount of dye will also be put onto your eye so that the abrasion can be seen more clearly. This may cause a temporary yellow tint on the eye and surrounding skin, which fades quickly.

## What is the treatment for a corneal abrasion?

Treatment helps reduce pain, promote healing, and prevent infection. Your doctor may recommend:

### 1. Antibiotic eye drops or ointment

- Prevents infection while the scratch heals
- The cornea usually heals in 2–3 days, but follow your doctor's full course of treatment.

### 2. Lubricating ointment (especially at night)

- Keeps the eye moist
- Prevents your eyelid from sticking to the healing cornea
- May be needed for several weeks.

### 3. Cyclopentolate drops

- Dilates the pupil to relieve pain
- May cause blurred vision for 12+ hours
- Do not drive while your vision is blurred.

### 4. Eye padding

- If used, this can help reduce pain and prevent further injury
- Be extra cautious when walking, especially on stairs.

We usually do not prescribe local anaesthetic drops for home use, as they can delay healing and cause further damage.

Your nurse or doctor will explain how and when to use any medication or eye drops provided.

## 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?

Most corneal abrasions heal fully with no lasting effects if treated properly.

However, a small number of patients may develop a condition called recurrent corneal erosion syndrome.

This occurs when the surface of the eye does not stick properly during healing. It may tear again when opening your eyes or during sleep. If this happens, you may need long-term lubricants or laser treatment.

## What can I do to help myself?

Do not drive if your vision is blurred or if you are using an eye pad  
Be careful on stairs or in low-light areas if wearing an eye pad  
Use painkillers like paracetamol or ibuprofen as needed, along with any treatments prescribed.

## When to seek urgent help

Go to your nearest Eye Casualty or Emergency Department immediately if:

- You have vision loss
- You develop severe eye pain
- Your symptoms get worse or do not improve.

**If you have any questions concerning your eye condition or its treatment, please do not hesitate to contact the Eye Hospital 01273 696955**

## General support

For general medical advice please use the NHS website, the **NHS 111** service, walk-in-centres, or your GP.

- The **NHS website** [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk) provides online health information and guidance.
- **NHS 111** phone line offers medical help and advice from trained advisers supported by nurses and paramedics. Available 24 hours a day. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.
- There are **walk-in and urgent treatment services** [www.uhsussex.nhs.uk/services/accident-emergency](http://www.uhsussex.nhs.uk/services/accident-emergency) at Brighton Station, in Crawley and at Lewes Victoria Hospital.
- **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)** [www.uhsussex.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/support/pals/](http://www.uhsussex.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/support/pals/) can be contacted with your comments and concerns, and to provide general support.

This information is intended for patients receiving care in Brighton & Hove or Haywards Heath.

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