

Eye injuries



It's common for a speck of dirt to get blown into your eye, for soap to wash into your eye, or for you to accidentally bump your eye. For these types of minor eye injuries, home treatment is usually all that is needed. Some sports and recreational activities increase the risk of eye injuries.

- Very high-risk sports include boxing, wrestling, and martial arts.
- High-risk sports include baseball, football, tennis, and fencing.
- Low-risk sports include swimming and gymnastics (no body contact or use of a ball, bat, or racquet).

Blows to the eye

Direct blows to the eye can damage the skin and other tissues around the eye, the eyeball, or the bones of the eye socket. Blows to the eye often cause bruising around the eye (black eye) or cuts to the eyelid. If a blow to the eye or a cut to the eyelid occurred during an accident, be sure to check for injuries to the eyeball itself and for other injuries, especially to the head or face. Concern about an eye injury may cause you to miss other injuries that need attention.

Burns to the eye

Burns to the eye may be caused by chemicals, fumes, hot air or steam, sunlight, tanning lamps, electric hair curlers or dryers, or welding equipment. Bursts of flames or flash fires from stoves or explosives can also burn the face and eyes.

- Chemical burns can occur if a solid chemical, liquid chemical, or chemical fumes get into the eye. Many substances will not cause damage if they are flushed out of the eye quickly. Acids and alkali substances can damage the eye. It may take 24 hours after the burn to determine the seriousness of an eye burn. Chemical fumes and vapors can also irritate the eyes.
- Bright sunlight (especially when the sun is reflecting off snow or water) can burn your eyes if you do not wear sunglasses that filter out ultraviolet (UV) light. Eyes that are not protected by a mask can be burned by exposure to the high-intensity light of a welder's equipment (torch or arc). The eyes also may be injured by other bright lights, such as from tanning booths or sunlamps.

Foreign objects in the eye

A foreign object in the eye, such as dirt, an eyelash, a contact lens, or makeup, can cause eye symptoms.

- Objects may scratch the surface of the eye (cornea) or become stuck on the eye. If the cornea is scratched, it can be hard to tell whether the object has been removed, because a scratched cornea may feel painful and as though something is still in the eye.
- Small or sharp objects traveling at high speeds can cause serious injury to many parts of the eyeball. Objects flying from a lawn mower, grinding wheel, or any tool may strike the eye and possibly puncture the eyeball. Injury may cause bleeding between the iris and cornea (hyphema), a change in the size or shape of the pupil, or damage to the structures inside the eyeball. These objects may be deep in the eye and may require medical treatment.

In the case of a car air bag inflating, all three types of eye injuries can occur. The force of impact can cause a blow to the eye, foreign objects may enter the eye, and chemicals in the air bag can burn the eye.

Eye injuries can be prevented by using protective eyewear. Wear safety glasses, goggles, or face shields when working with power tools or chemicals or doing any activity that might cause an object or substance to get into your eyes. Some professions, such as health care and construction, may require workers to use protective eyewear to reduce the risk of foreign objects or substances or body fluids getting in the eyes.

After an eye injury, you need to watch for vision changes and symptoms of an infection. Most minor eye injuries can be treated at home. See the Home Treatment section for first aid measures. Review the Emergencies and Check Your Symptoms sections to determine if and when you need to see a doctor.

Emergencies

Do you have any of the following symptoms that require emergency treatment? **Call 911 or other emergency services immediately.**

- An object has punctured and penetrated the eye. Do not bandage or put any pressure on the eye. If an object has penetrated the eyeball, hold the object in place to prevent further movement and injury to the eye.
- An eyeball is bulging out of its socket or looks abnormal after an injury.
- Sudden partial or complete vision loss has occurred in one or both eyes. Treatment is needed within 90 minutes to save vision.
- Severe pain continues after 30 minutes of flushing a chemical from the eye.
- Normal vision is limited to one functional eye.

Prevention

The following tips may help prevent eye injuries.

- Wear safety glasses, goggles, or face shields when you hammer nails or metal, work with power tools or chemicals, or do any activity that might cause a burn to your eyes. If you work with hazardous chemicals that could splash into your eyes, know how to flush chemicals out, and know the location of the nearest shower or sink.
- If you are welding or near someone else who is welding, wear a mask or goggles designed for welding.
- Wear protective eyewear during sports such as hockey, racquetball, or paintball that involve the risk of a blow to the eye. Baseball is the most common sport to cause eye injuries. Fishhook injuries are another common cause of eye injuries. Protective eyewear can prevent sports-related eye injuries more than 90% of the time. An eye examination may be helpful in determining what type of protective eyewear is needed.
- Injuries from ultraviolet (UV) light can be prevented by wearing sunglasses that block ultraviolet (UV) rays and by wearing broad-brimmed hats. Be aware that the eye can be injured from sun glare while boating, sunbathing, or skiing. Use eye protection while you are under tanning lamps or using tanning booths. Laser pointers have not been shown to cause eye injury.
- Wear your seat belt when in a motor vehicle. Use child car seats.

Prevention tips for children

Eye injuries are common in children, and many can be prevented. Most eye injuries happen in older children. They happen more often in boys than in girls. Toys—from crayons to toy guns—are a major source of injury, so check all toys for sharp or pointed parts. Household items, such as elastic cords, can also strike the eye and cause injury.

Teach your children about eye safety.

- Be a good role model—always wear proper eye protection.
- Get protective eyewear for your children and help them use it properly.
- Teach children that flying toys should never be pointed at another person.
- Teach children how to carry sharp or pointed objects properly.
- Teach children that any kind of missile, projectile, or BB gun is not a toy.
- Use safety measures near fires and explosives, such as campfires and fireworks.

Any eye injury that appears unusual for a child's age should be evaluated as possible child abuse.



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