

Corneal Abrasions and Recurrent Corneal Erosions

What is a corneal abrasion?

The cornea is the clear dome shaped tissue on the front of the eye. When the cornea is scratched (by a fingernail, contact lens, tree branch or other object) the injury is called a corneal abrasion.

Most people are immediately aware that something has scratched their eye because the cornea is extremely sensitive and even a small injury can be very painful. In addition to pain, symptoms may include sensitivity to light, tearing, redness, and feeling as if something is in the eye.

Only an eye doctor can recommend the correct treatment for someone with a corneal abrasion.

Your eye doctor will examine your eye and remove any objects that he or she finds. Anesthetic eye drops will make this procedure more comfortable.

Most of the time, small superficial corneal abrasions will heal in a few days. The doctor will probably prescribe eye drops to keep the eye moist and prevent infection. It is important to use these eye drops as recommended. It might also be necessary to stop wearing contact lenses for a while. Your doctor may also patch they eye to decrease the amount of pain caused by blinking against a scratched cornea. If it is severe, pain medications may be prescribed as well. Larger corneal abrasions will take longer to heal.

Do corneal abrasions heal completely?

Most corneal abrasions heal without causing any other problems. Even after the original injury is healed, however, the surface of the cornea is sometimes not as smooth as before. Some people who have had a corneal abrasion notice that the eye feels irritated again a few weeks after the abrasion has healed.

This feeling may be a sign of a problem with the corneal epithelium - a thin layer of cells that is the surface of the cornea. These cells are important in the healing of corneal abrasions. Any spot where they do not grow back to protect the surface of the cornea becomes irritated. When the cells keep growing back and then slipping off again, it is called a recurrent corneal erosion.

Recurrent Corneal Erosions

Recurrent corneal erosions can cause great discomfort. Your doctor might recommend using eye drops to lubricate the eye. It might be necessary to stop wearing contact lenses altogether. In some cases, surgery might be recommended to make the corneal surface smooth again. Your ophthalmologist will discuss the options with you if you are diagnosed with a recurrent corneal erosion.