

## **Ocular Herpes**

Ocular herpes is a recurrent viral infection of the cornea that is caused by the herpes simplex virus. The primary cause of ocular herpes is the herpes simplex virus I (HSV I). This is the same virus that causes cold sores, but ocular herpes can also result from the sexually transmitted herpes simplex II virus (HSV II) that causes genital herpes.

Herpetic corneal infection is the most common infectious cause of corneal blindness in the U.S. Once people have an episode of ocular herpes, they have up to a 50 percent chance of having a recurrence of the disease. This second flare-up can come anytime--weeks or even years--after the initial occurrence. Some factors that are associated with recurrence include stress, fever, sunlight, and eye injury.

Ocular herpes can produce a painful blister-like sore on the eyelid or surface of the eye and cause inflammation of the cornea. Symptoms of ocular herpes include extreme sensitivity to light, decreased vision, pain, watering, redness and feeling as if there is something in the eye.

Prompt treatment with anti-viral drugs, either drops or pills, or both, is crucial to stop the herpes virus from multiplying and destroying epithelial cells. The infection may spread deeper into the cornea, developing into a more severe infection called stromal keratitis, which causes the body's immune system to attack and destroy stromal cells. Stromal keratitis is more difficult to treat than more superficial (epithelial) corneal infections. Recurrent episodes of stromal keratitis can cause scarring of the cornea, which can lead to loss of vision and sometimes blindness.

Like herpetic infections elsewhere in the body, herpes involving the eye cannot be completely cured, but it can be controlled. It is very important to see your ophthalmologist regularly if you are diagnosed with an ocular herpes infection.

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