

What Is Corneal Abrasion?

Corneal abrasion is a scratch or scrape on the cornea, the clear, round dome covering the eye's iris and pupil. By helping to focus light as it enters the eye, the cornea plays an important role in vision. When a corneal abrasion scars the cornea, it can affect vision.

Corneal abrasions can often be prevented by using protective eyewear when performing activities that put your eyes at risk of injury.

What Causes Corneal Abrasion?

Small children are a common source of corneal abrasions because they can accidentally poke the eyes of whoever is holding them. In some cases, the immediate cause of a corneal abrasion may not be apparent, as symptoms may occur hours after the injury to the cornea.

There are a variety of causes of corneal abrasions. These include:

- Something hitting or blowing into the eye, such as plant matter, sawdust, or ash;
- Foreign matter, such as dust, dirt or sand, getting stuck under your eyelid;
- Sports injuries;
- Improperly fitted or maintained contact lenses;
- Something poking you in the eye;
- Rubbing your eyes vigorously, especially if you feel something is caught in your eye;
- Certain eye conditions, including trachoma, a bacterial infection;
- Undergoing surgery under general anesthesia.

Corneal Abrasion Symptoms

If you suffer a corneal abrasion, you may experience the following symptoms:

- Pain, which may feel worse when you open or close your eye
- A feeling that there is something in your eye
- Tearing
- Redness
- Sensitivity to light
- Blurred vision or loss of vision
- Headache

Sometimes you may not be aware you have suffered a corneal abrasion or how it happened, as symptoms may occur hours after the injury.

If something flies in your eye, you can try to flush it out with tap water. However, it is important that you do not rub your eye, as that may only worsen the abrasion.

Corneal Abrasion Diagnosis

If you have any of the symptoms of a corneal abrasion, you should seek care from your ophthalmologist (Eye M.D.). He or she will perform a thorough eye examination. During the examination, your Eye M.D. may put numbing drops in your eye so that it can stay open for the examination.

To accurately diagnose a corneal abrasion, your Eye M.D. may perform a fluorescein eye stain. This is a test that uses orange dye (fluorescein) and a blue light to detect damage to the cornea.

Corneal Abrasion Treatment

A minor corneal abrasion will heal on its own in a few days. Your Eye M.D. may put antibiotic eye drops or ointment in your eyes or use steroid eyedrops to reduce inflammation and reduce the chance of scarring.

If you have a corneal abrasion, your ophthalmologist may patch your eye so that you are more comfortable. You may also be given medication to reduce the pain. Wearing sunglasses may also lessen the symptoms of corneal abrasion while you are healing.

If you wear contact lenses, you should not wear them until your Eye M.D. says that it is safe to do so.