EYE-SAVING FIRST AID

- Clip-and-save chart
- Prevention tips
- Be prepared!
Do you remember the last time you got an eyelash or a speck of dirt caught in your eye? It’s amazing how something so small can cause so much discomfort. On the other hand, certain severe problems that could lead to blindness may be painless. That’s why you might have a hard time deciding which eye symptoms are serious and which are not. This booklet can help you respond quickly and appropriately to common eye complaints. Save it for future reference—it could help you save your sight.

Swift action is crucial in any eye emergency. You can handle some problems—such as an irritating speck of grit—simply by knowing how to ease the object out. “For something that can hurt so badly, the eye can recover amazingly fast,” says Dr. Earle Hunter, the executive director of the American Optometric Association.

But some eye conditions require immediate professional treatment to prevent permanent damage or even blindness. How can you tell when it’s okay to handle an injury yourself and when expert care is needed? The following symptoms need an eye-care practitioner’s attention:

- Pain plus redness
- Pain plus discharge from the eye
- Blurred or double vision
- Loss of vision in any area of the visual field
- Spots, streaks, or flashes that obscure vision, even if they aren’t accompanied by pain.

When in doubt, never “wait and see.” Dr. Wayne Fung, a clinical professor of ophthalmology at Pacific Presbyterian Medical Center in San Francisco, stresses that in some cases failure to get professional help can jeopardize your vision.

Would you know whom to call in an eye-related emergency? Add your eye practitioner to your list of emergency telephone numbers. Another option is a trip to an emergency room. The personnel there can generally provide initial care for a vision problem; for a severe condition, they’ll call a specialist.

A thorough emergency exam, says Fung, includes three important procedures: (1) a test for acuity; (2) the use of a slit lamp, a microscope (with a chin rest) that gives the doctor a magnified view of the eye; and (3) an application of fluorescein dye, which stains small scratches in the eye to make them more visible under a special blue light.

To learn how to reduce your chances of an eye accident, read the following box and the accompanying Vision Health booklet “What Athletes Must Know.”

### KEEP YOURSELF INJURY-FREE

Of the one million eye injuries that occur each year, the National Society to Prevent Blindness reports that nearly half happen around the house. What are the leading causes?

- **Household products.** Read the instructions carefully before you use cleaning fluids, detergents (in liquid or powder form), or other chemicals. These substances can cause serious burns if they come in contact with the eyes. Wash your hands thoroughly after using them.
- **Spray cleaners.** Before you use one of these, be sure that the container’s nozzle is pointed away from you.
- **Lye and alkali products.** Be extremely careful with cleansers and alkali products that are used to unclog sinks. After using a drain cleaner, don’t lean over to look down the drain—and never try to open the drain with a forceful stream of water, which could splash alkali up into your eyes.
- **Pesticides.** Always remember to turn the spray nozzle away from your face whenever you work with a garden pesticide. Safety goggles offer added protection.
- **Lawn mowers.** Before mowing the lawn, pick up fallen twigs, branches, rocks, and stones that could be thrown toward your face. Don’t let anyone stand beside or in front of a moving lawn mower.
- **Workshop activities.** Use safety glasses or goggles to protect your eyes from chemical fumes and flying fragments. Goggles are especially important in metalworking or auto-body repair, in which steel comes in contact with steel and can release dangerous shards of airborne metal.
- **Battery acid.** The acid in your car’s battery is highly flammable and can cause serious eye damage. When you check the level of battery fluid or jump-start your car, always put out all cigarettes and matches. Use a flashlight, never a match or lighter, to shine light on the battery.
FAST-ACTION FIRST AID
Plain tap water, ice, and common sense, not fancy medical supplies, are usually all you'll need for an eye accident. Refer to this chart in an emergency, but remember that first aid is just the first step. If there is any possibility of eye damage or impaired vision, get help immediately.

- **Blow to the eye**
  Hold a cold compress on the eye for about 15 minutes to relieve pain and swelling.
  Get help if a black eye develops or if other problems (double or blurred vision, black spots or streaks) persist after the swelling has gone down.

- **Chemical irritation**
  Immediately flush the eye with water, and keep flushing it for at least five minutes. You can do this by holding your head under a faucet or gentle shower, using a kitchen spray nozzle, or pouring water into the eye from a clean container.

  Use your fingers to keep the eye wide open, and roll the eyeball as much as you can. Do not bandage the eye.

  See an eye doctor as soon as possible and take the chemical container along if you can.

- **Scratched eye or eyelid**
  Close the eye and cover it lightly with a clean bandage. Do not press on the eye or attempt to rinse it. Get help immediately.

- **Floaters, black spots, or cobwebs**
  Occasional specks, dots, circles, lines, or other "floaters" in the visual field are normal and do not require treatment.

  Get help if you notice the sudden, painless appearance of large or numerous black spots, streaks, or "cobwebs." These may be signs of a torn retina or bleeding within the eye.

- **Flashes of light**
  Flashes are caused when the gel that fills the eye pulls away from the retina. If these flashbulblike illuminations are intense, seem to be changing, or are accompanied by other symptoms, call your eye doctor.

- **Discharge, pain, swelling, or severe or prolonged redness or itching**
  Get help; these may be symptoms of conjunctivitis, an irritation of the front membrane of the eye. It can be caused by infection or allergy, a scratched cornea, a corneal ulcer, or a viral or bacterial infection.

- **Red spot in the eye**
  The sudden appearance of a spot of blood in the white part of the eye may be a harmless subconjunctival hemorrhage or broken blood vessel. It should fade in one to two weeks.

  If the blood seeps out of the eye or is accompanied by other symptoms, get help.

- **Foreign body in the eye**
  Pull the upper lid outward and down over the lower lid to dislodge the object. Blink a few times, but do not rub. If that fails, try flushing with water.

  Consult an eye doctor if any speck remains in the eye or if the eye is red or sensitive to light. Note: Do not try to remove any foreign object that doesn't rinse out of the eye (especially a splinter of wood or metal); get help immediately.

- **Sty**
  A sty is an infection of an oil gland within the eyelid, along the lashes. Apply a warm compress three or four times a day to relieve swelling and tenderness. Never squeeze a sty.

  Seek help if the symptoms persist for more than three or four days, or if the swelling spreads throughout the lid.

- **Sudden change in vision**
  Always consult an eye doctor for any sudden onset of eye pain (especially if you also see halos around lights, a sign of glaucoma) or for suddenly blurred vision, which can signal macular degeneration.

CONTACT CAUTION
If you experience eye discomfort or vision problems while wearing contact lenses, remove your lenses immediately. Inspect each one closely for dirt, scratches, cracks, or tears. If the lenses are damaged, do not put them back in your eyes.

Place them in their case and contact your eye-care practitioner. If you see foreign material on the lenses—or if the problem goes away and the lenses appear normal—clean and rinse them thoroughly and replace them in your eyes.

Never continue to wear a contact lens if you're experiencing any eye discomfort or change in vision. See your eye-care practitioner immediately.