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Preventing Eye Injuries

Any activity where something might fly at the eye puts the eye at risk for an injury. Over one million people suffer eye injuries each year in the United States. Almost 50% of these accidents occur at home, and more than 90% of them could have been prevented.

Minor injuries to the cornea, the clear, protective covering over the front of the eye, can be quite painful. A corneal abrasion is a scratch to the cornea. Appropriate treatment may include an antibiotic eyedrop or ointment to prevent infection and an eye patch for comfort. Sand or other particles can stick to the cornea. Such foreign bodies may be removed with a moistened cotton swab, usually by a doctor. Do not rub the eye.

Regular prescription eyeglasses or contact lenses do not protect the eyes from injury. Some glasses and some types of contact lenses shatter if the eye is hit. People who play sports and wear prescription eyeglasses can have special safety glasses or prescription goggles made of high-impact polycarbonate plastic lenses and special unbreakable frames.

Unfortunately, many people do not think they are at risk for an eye injury until the injury occurs. The majority of eye injuries are easily prevented. Use common sense to reduce the risk of injuries, and be sure to follow safety precautions, including the following:

- Wear safety goggles when using powerful chemicals. Goggles should fit properly to prevent chemicals from getting under them yet still allow air to circulate between the eye and the lens.
- Polycarbonate sports goggles are recommended for all participants of high-impact sports or activities where there is a high risk of eye injury.
- Never use fireworks. Attend public fireworks displays instead of having fireworks at home. Amateur backyard displays are dangerous to the person lighting the fireworks, nearby family members, friends, neighbors, and pets.
- Supervise children when they are handling potentially dangerous objects, such as pencils, scissors, and penknives. Be aware that even common household items such as paper clips, elastic cords, wire coat hangers, rubber bands, and fishhooks can cause a serious eye injury.
- Avoid projectile toys such as darts and bows and arrows. Do not allow children to play with air-powered rifles, pellet guns, and BB guns. They are extremely dangerous and have been reclassified as firearms and removed from toy departments.
- Wear eye protection while mowing the lawn or using a “weed eater.” Stones and debris thrown from moving blades can cause severe eye injuries.
- Always check to make sure that a spray nozzle is pointed away from your face before using.
- Use grease shields to cover frying pans and protect eyes from splattering liquids.
- Wear snug-fitting, completely opaque eyeglasses or goggles to shield your eyes and block all UV light in tanning booths. Tanning facilities are required by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to provide safety goggles, but it is best to obtain your own pair so you will always be prepared. If you use the salon’s goggles, be sure that the salon personnel sterilize them after each use to prevent infection and that the goggles are approved for this particular use.
- Read instructions and safety warnings carefully before using tools, chemicals, ammonia, cleaning supplies, and so on.
- Wear safety goggles and be sure you read the instructions carefully before jump-starting a car. Attach the negative ground of the dead battery last. This cable should be attached to the engine away from the dead battery terminal. *Never attach a cable to the negative terminal of the dead battery.*

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- Never use a match or lighter to look under the hood of a car.

When an eye injury does occur, have an ophthalmologist (Eye M.D.) or other medical doctor examine the eye as soon as possible. Although the injury may not look or feel serious, it could cause serious damage to your eyes. If you have blurred vision, partial loss of vision, double vision, or sharp pains in your eye after an accident, see an ophthalmologist or go to a hospital emergency room right away.