Subconjunctival Hemorrhage

A subconjunctival hemorrhage is a bright red patch covering a portion of the white of the eye. The white part of the eye is called the sclera, and it is covered by a thin membrane called the conjunctiva. This membrane is clear, except for tiny blood vessels that you can see with the naked eye. When your eye is irritated or inflamed and becomes red, it is because the vessels in the conjunctiva are swollen.

Sometimes, a blood vessel in the conjunctiva can break and bleed. When this occurs, the blood builds up between the conjunctiva and the sclera, and spreads out to create a red area. The red spot may be very small at first. It may then spread to cover a larger part of the surface of the eye, or even all of the visible white part of the eye.

In almost all cases, the blood will go away and the eye will become white again. Before completely dissolving, however, the red area may spread. It may also become brownish-yellow in color, before going away. If a lot of blood collects under the conjunctiva, it may look like a bulge on the surface of the eye. This looks scary, but it will also eventually flatten out and go away. Subconjunctival hemorrhages do not cause pain, but if swollen, may cause a feeling of irritation. There is no effect on vision.

CAUSES

- The most common cause is mild trauma (rubbing the eye, irritation).
- Subconjunctival hemorrhages can happen because of coughing or straining (lifting heavy objects), vomiting, or sneezing.
- In some cases, your doctor may want to check your blood pressure. High blood pressure can also cause a sunconjunctival hemorrhage.
- Severe trauma or blunt injuries.
- Diseases that affect blood clotting (hemophilia, leukemia).
- Abnormalities of blood vessels behind the eye (carotid cavernous sinus fistula).
- Tumors behind the eye.
- Certain drugs (aspirin, coumadin, heparin).
- Recent eye surgery.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Do not worry about the appearance of your eye. You may continue your usual activities.
- Often, follow-up is not necessary.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Your eye becomes painful.
- The bleeding does not disappear within 3 weeks.
- Bleeding occurs elsewhere, for example, under the skin, in the mouth, or in the other eye.
- You have recurring subconjunctival hemorrhages.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Your vision changes or you have difficulty seeing.
- You develop severe headache, persistent vomiting, confusion, or abnormal drowsiness (*lethargy*).
- Your eye seems to bulge or protrude from the eye socket.
- You notice the sudden appearance of bruises, or have spontaneous bleeding elsewhere on your body.

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