Foreign Body, Eye

The term *foreign body* refers to any object near, on the surface of, or in the eye that should not be there. A foreign body may be a small speck of dirt or dust, a hair or eyelash, a splinter or any object.

CAUSES

Foreign bodies can get in the eye by:

- Flying pieces of something that was broken or destroyed (*debris*).
- A sudden injury (*trauma*) to the eye.

SYMPTOMS

Symptoms depend on what the foreign body is and where it is in the eye. The most common locations are:

- On the inner surface of the upper or lower eyelids or on the covering of the white part of the eye (*conjunctiva*). Symptoms in this location are:
  - Irritating and painful, especially when blinking.
  - Feeling like something is in the eye.
- On the surface of the clear covering on the front of the eye (*cornea*). A corneal foreign body has symptoms that:
  - Are painful and irritating since the cornea is very sensitive.
  - Form small "rust rings" around a metallic foreign body. Metallic foreign bodies stick more firmly to the surface of the cornea.
- Inside the eyeball. Infection can happen fast and can be hard to treat with antibiotics. This is an extremely dangerous situation. Foreign bodies inside the eye can threaten vision. A person may even loose their eye. Foreign bodies inside the eye may cause:
  - Great pain.
  - Immediate loss of vision.

DIAGNOSIS

Foreign bodies are found during an exam by an eye specialist. Those that are on the eyelids, conjunctiva or cornea are usually (but not always) easily found. When a foreign body is inside the eyeball, a cataract may form almost right away. This makes it hard for an ophthalmologist to find the foreign body. Special tests may be needed, including ultrasound testing, X-rays and CT scans.

TREATMENT

- Foreign bodies that are on the eyelids, conjunctiva or cornea are often removed easily and painlessly.
- If the foreign body has caused a scratch or abrasion of the cornea, antibiotic drops, ointments and/or a tight patch called a "pressure patch" may be needed. Follow-up exams will be needed for several days until the abrasion heals.
- Surgery is needed right away if the foreign body is inside the eyeball. This is a medical emergency. An antibiotic therapy will likely be given to stop an infection.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

The use of eye patches is not universal. Their use varies from state to state and from caregiver to caregiver.

If an eye patch was applied:

- Keep the eye patch on until the follow-up appointment.
- **Do not** remove the patch to put in medications unless instructed to do so. When replacing the patch, retape it as it was before. Follow the same procedure if the patch becomes loose.
- **WARNING: do not** drive or operate machinery while the eye is patched. The ability to judge distances will be impaired.
- Only take over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort or fever as directed by the caregiver.

If no eye patch was applied:

- Keep the eye closed as much as possible. **Do not** rub the eye.
- Wear dark glasses as needed to protect the eyes from bright light.
- **Do not** wear contact lenses until the eye feels normal again, or as instructed.
- Wear protective eye covering if there is a risk of eye injury. This is important when working with high speed tools.
- Only take over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort or fever as directed by the caregiver.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Pain increases in the eye or the vision changes.
- You or your child has problems with the eye patch.
- The injury to the eye appears to be getting larger.
- There is discharge from the injured eye.
- Swelling and/or soreness (*inflammation*) develops around the affected eye.
- You or your child has an oral temperature above 102° F (38.9° C), not controlled by medicine.
- Your baby is older than 3 months with a rectal temperature of 102º F (38.9º C) or higher.
- **Your baby is 3 months old or younger with a rectal temperature of 100.4º F (38º C) or higher.**

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

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