Corneal Abrasion

What is it?
The cornea is the clear layer of tissue that covers the iris and pupil of the eye. A corneal abrasion is an injury to this tissue. It may be helpful to think of it as a scratch or scrape on the cornea.

What causes it and is it contagious?
A corneal abrasion can be caused by many things including a contact lens, a fingernail, a piece of paper, a tree branch, eye makeup brushes, front air bags, or any object that gets into the eye, such as sand, dirt, sawdust or metal shavings. Exposure to electric arc welding or tanning beds without proper eye protection and prolonged exposure to bright sunlight without sunglasses can increase the risk of corneal abrasion. It is not contagious.

What are its common symptoms?
The most common symptoms are pain, redness, teary eyes, a feeling that an object is in the eye, sensitivity to light, pain while moving the eye and blurry vision. Corneal abrasions are usually limited to one eye, but can occur in both eyes, especially from wearing contact lenses for too long.

How long will it last?
If no foreign body remains in the eye, it will usually heal completely in 24-48 hours, leaving no permanent damage. Healing can take longer, depending on severity and treatment.

What can your health care provider do?
Your health care provider will thoroughly examine your eye for signs of a foreign body or severe eye injury. If a problem is present which is not within the scope of our practice, your provider will make a decision about possible referral. If a corneal abrasion is evident, your provider will treat your eye with appropriate medications. You may be prescribed antibiotic drops or ointment as well as an analgesic for pain. An eye patch may be applied at the physician's direction.

What can you do?
Antibiotic drops or ointment is applied to the eye. The provider may decide whether or not to apply an eye patch to prevent the eyelid from moving. The most important thing that you can do is leave the patch in place for as long as directed. Do not rub or pull at the patch because this may loosen it and delay healing. Wearing an eye patch is often very uncomfortable and unappealing, but is usually necessary for only 24 hours. Remember to keep the patch dry and be careful walking and climbing stairs, as your depth perception will be impaired. Do not drive while wearing an eye patch.

Contact lens wearers should not put in lenses until the course of medication is complete. Contact lenses alter the flow of tears and medication across the eye. Further, these medications can stain or cloud soft lenses.

Can you prevent it?
Often, corneal abrasions can be prevented. Clip infants' and young children's fingernails short. Be careful when inserting or removing contact lenses. Cut low-hanging tree branches. Use care when using any objects near the eyes. Do not apply eye makeup in a moving care. Wear protective goggles when working around wood, steel, dirt, or other materials that may fly up into the eyes.

Follow-up
It is important to return for your follow-up visit as prescribed by your provider. If a follow-up visit is necessary, your health care provider will evaluate how you have responded to the treatment.

Remember
Notify your health care provider if you have any of the following symptoms:
- Pain that persists
- Temperature above 100°
- Hives or rash
- Visual changes
- Severe headache
- Nausea, vomiting
- Pain in or behind the eyeball

Reference
Emedicine at: www.emedicine.com

If you are a registered University of Illinois student and you have questions or concerns, or need to make an appointment, please call: Dial-A-Nurse at 333-2700

If you are concerned about any difference in your treatment plan and the information in this handout, you are advised to contact your health care provider.

Visit the McKinley Health Center Web site at: http://www.mckinley.illinois.edu