

# Foreign body in the eye

## What is a foreign body?

A foreign body is any substance or object that does not belong (in this case, does not belong in your eye). Foreign bodies in the eye may include a speck of dust, wood chip, metal shaving, grass clipping, insect or a piece of glass. Most foreign bodies are found under the eyelid or on the surface of your eye.

## What are the symptoms?

- A 'feeling' of something being in your eye
- A sharp pain in your eye, followed by burning and irritation
- Your eye is watery and red
- You have a scratchy feeling when you blink
- You have blurred vision or loss of vision in the affected eye
- You are more sensitive to bright lights

Once the foreign body is removed, symptoms should ease.

## Why is a foreign body a problem?

Most injuries are minor and, with the right treatment, heal without problems.

If the foreign body is not removed from your eye, it can cause an infection and scarring.

A metal object will react with your eye's natural tears, and this can lead to rust forming around the piece of metal. This is seen as a dark spot on the white of your eye and can cause a scar that may affect your vision.

A foreign body may scratch the surface of the eye (corneal laceration or abrasion). This can happen with a glancing blow from a finger, paper, twig or stone. With the right treatment, most corneal abrasions, even large ones, heal within 48 hours. Sometimes a scratch may not heal. An ulcer may form, which can affect your vision.

An object that pierces your eye and enters your eyeball can cause serious injury and even blindness. This is rare.

## Treatment

Your doctor will check your vision and, if possible, any foreign body will be gently removed. Your eye may be washed in saline (sterile salt water) to flush out any dust and dirt. An eye drop to numb your eye (local anaesthetic) may be used to ease the discomfort while your eye is examined and the foreign

body removed. Please note that the eye drop to numb your eye is usually not given to you to take home because the local anaesthetic may interfere with the natural healing of the eye. Sometimes a CT scan is needed to see if an object has entered your eyeball. Occasionally, you may need to be referred to a specialist for further treatment.

Your doctor may prescribe antibiotic eye drops or ointment to prevent infection. Your doctor may suggest artificial tears or lubricants (available without a prescription) to make the eye more comfortable.

Pain medication, such as regular paracetamol, may be helpful if your eye is sore. Cool compresses can be used over your closed eye.

## Home care

- Avoid working with machinery
- Follow your doctor's advice about how to use the eye drops or ointment and how often to use them
- Wash your hands before using drops or ointment on your eyes
- To use drops or ointment, rest your finger on your cheek and pull down the lower eyelid. Tilt your head back and drop the liquid in. For ointment, smear a small amount along the inside of the lower lid. Make sure the nozzle does not touch your eye.
- Continue the treatment until the eye has healed
- Keep all drops and ointment out of reach of children. Some drops contain agents that damage contact lenses.

You may have some discomfort in the eye when you get home. Take pain relief that contains paracetamol. Follow the packet for instructions.

Do not use contact lenses until you finish your eye treatments.

## Prevention

- The best way to prevent this happening again is to protect your eyes
- Do not stand or walk near anyone who is grinding or drilling
- Always wear safety goggles when working in dusty or windy areas, such as when mowing, gardening or using machinery. These activities can produce flying debris, which may lodge in the eye. Safety goggles should be close-fitting. Regular sunglasses or corrective glasses are not enough.

### First aid

If you get something in your eye again, wash your eye with water or saline. Do not try to remove a foreign body yourself. Go straight to your doctor or hospital emergency department for help.

### Follow-up

The doctor may recommend a review with your local doctor in 1-2 days, or make an appointment for review in the Cabrini ED Review Clinic to check that your eye is healing and that your vision is okay. You should not miss this appointment. Even though you may feel better, your eye may still not have healed fully. The follow-up is needed to make sure the treatment is working. If there are any serious problems you will be sent to an ophthalmologist (specialist eye doctor).

### Seeking help

**Cabrini Emergency Department (ED)** is staffed by experienced emergency doctors and nurses 24 hours a day, 7 days per week. If you have any questions about your ED treatment our qualified ED staff can be contacted on **(03) 9508 1500** at any time. If you need to return to Cabrini ED for ongoing care we would be glad to take care of you again and if this occurs within a week of your initial consultation the doctor's fee will be bulk-billed.

You can also expect to receive a phone call or SMS message from one of our emergency nurses the day after you have been discharged. The nurse will be able to clarify any aspect of your diagnosis, treatment, or follow-up.

In a medical emergency return to Cabrini ED if it is safe to do so or go to the nearest hospital emergency department or call an ambulance – dial triple zero (000).

#### Return to Cabrini ED if:

- You have increasing pain in your eyes
- Your vision is getting worse (or is blurry)
- Your eye is getting more sensitive to light
- You are concerned for any other reason

### Want to know more?

- Contact Cabrini ED on **(03) 9508 1500**
- Ask your local doctor or healthcare professional
- Visit the Better Health Channel at [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)