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Eye pain

Pain in the eye may be described as a burning, throbbing, aching, or stabbing sensation in or around the eye. It may also feel like you have a foreign object in your eye.

This article discusses eye pain that is not caused by injury or surgery.

Considerations

Pain in the eye can be an important symptom of a health problem. Make sure you tell your health care provider if you have eye pain that does not go away.

Tired eyes or some eye discomfort (eyestrain) is most often a minor problem and it will often go away with rest. These problems may be caused by the wrong eyeglass or contact lens prescription. Sometimes they are due to a problem with the eye muscles.

Causes

Many things can cause pain in or around the eye. If the pain is severe, does not go away, or causes vision loss, seek medical attention immediately.

Some things that can cause eye pain are:

- Infections
- Inflammation
- Contact lens problems
- Dry eye
- Acute glaucoma
- Sinus problems
- Neuropathy
- Eyestrain
- Headache
- Flu

Home Care

Resting your eyes should relieve discomfort due to eye strain.

If you wear contacts, try using glasses for a few days to see if the pain goes away.

When to Contact a Medical Professional

Contact your provider if:

- The pain is severe (call immediately), or it continues for more than 2 days
- You have decreased vision along with the eye pain
- You have chronic conditions like arthritis or autoimmune problems
- You have pain along with redness, swelling, discharge, or pressure in the eyes

What to Expect at Your Office Visit

Your provider will check your vision, eye movements, and the back of your eye. If there is a major concern, you should see an ophthalmologist. This is a doctor who specializes in eye problems.

To help find the source of the problem, your provider may ask:

- Do you have pain in both eyes?
- Is the pain in the eye or around the eye?
- Does it feel like something is in your eye now?
- Does your eye burn or throb?
- Did the pain begin suddenly?
- Is the pain worse when you move your eyes?
- Are you light sensitive?
- What other symptoms do you have?

The following eye tests may be done:

- Slit-lamp examination
- Fluorescein examination
- Eye pressure check if glaucoma is suspected
- Pupillary response to light

If the pain seems to come from the surface of the eye, such as with a foreign body, the provider may put anesthetic drops in your eyes. If the pain goes away, that will often confirm the surface as the source of the pain.

Alternative Names

Ophthalmalgia; Pain - eye

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