

PATIENT INFORMATION · URGENT CARE

Something in your eye

grit, chemicals and high-speed injuries

Most things that blow into an eye wash out easily and leave nothing worse than a gritty feeling for a day. Two situations are different and need acting on immediately: a chemical splash, and anything travelling at speed from grinding, hammering or drilling.

Go to an emergency eye service immediately if

- the injury involved **hammering, grinding, drilling, using a strimmer or an explosion** — even if the eye feels fine
- you have had a **chemical splash** — irrigate first, then go (see below)
- something is **stuck in or has penetrated the eye** — do not attempt to remove it
- there is **blood visible in the coloured part of the eye**, or the pupil looks an odd shape
- your **vision has changed**, or you are seeing flashes, floaters or a shadow
- the eye is **very painful** or you cannot open it

A high-speed fragment can pass through the eye wall leaving almost no mark and little pain. This needs an X-ray or scan to exclude, and delay costs sight. Do not press on the eye or remove an embedded object — cover it with a rigid shield, or the bottom of a plastic cup taped over the socket, and go. Moorfields Eye Hospital runs a 24-hour walk-in emergency eye service; the nearest emergency department is the Royal London Hospital, Whitechapel Road, London E1 1FR.

Chemical splash: irrigate before anything else

Do not wait, do not phone first, do not go looking for an eye wash station if there is a tap nearer. Hold the eye open under gently running lukewarm water, or pour water from a clean container, for **at least 20 minutes**. Roll the eye around while irrigating so the fluid reaches everywhere, and pull the lids away from the eyeball. Remove contact lenses while irrigating if you can do so quickly. Then go to an emergency eye service, taking the container or a photograph of the product with you. Alkalis — oven cleaner, cement, drain unblocker, plaster — do more damage than acids and continue to burn until washed out.

If something has simply blown in

- 1 **Do not rub the eye.** Rubbing drags the particle across the surface and turns an irritation into a scratch.

- 2 **Remove contact lenses.**
- 3 **Blink several times** and let the eye water — tears wash most things out unaided.
- 4 **Pull the upper lid down over the lower lid** and hold it there for a moment. The lower lashes often sweep the particle out from under the upper lid.
- 5 **Rinse** with clean water or sterile saline, holding the lid open and letting water run across the eye from the inner corner outwards.
- 6 **If it is still there after that**, stop trying and get it looked at. Do not use tweezers, cotton buds or a fingernail on the eye.

After a foreign body has been removed

- The eye often feels **gritty for 24 to 48 hours** afterwards, as the surface heals. That is expected.
- Antibiotic ointment or drops may be prescribed to prevent infection while the surface repairs.
- **Do not wear contact lenses** until the eye is completely comfortable and you have been told it is safe.
- A rust ring can be left behind by a metal fragment and sometimes needs a second visit to remove — this is routine.
- Avoid dusty environments and wear eye protection while it heals.

Come back urgently if

- pain is **increasing** rather than settling after the first day
- vision becomes blurred, or you notice a white spot on the coloured part of the eye
- the eye becomes increasingly red, sticky or sensitive to light

Arc eye and welder's flash

Ultraviolet exposure from welding without a mask, a sunbed, or bright snow causes intense pain, watering and light sensitivity that typically begins **six to twelve hours later**, often waking someone in the night. It is a surface burn, it is extremely painful, and it heals within a day or two. Rest the eyes, keep them closed, use lubricating drops and take painkillers — but have it confirmed rather than assumed, and never use anaesthetic drops repeatedly, which prevents healing.

Eye protection

Almost every serious workplace eye injury we see was preventable with goggles. If you grind, cut, hammer, drill or work with chemicals, wear proper protection every time, including for the two-minute job. Ordinary prescription glasses are not eye protection.

Book an appointment if you have a persistent gritty sensation, need a foreign body removed, need the eye stained and examined for a scratch, or need a follow-up check after an injury. We can assess you the same day and refer urgently to ophthalmology where it is warranted.

Eye assessed the same day

Same-day appointments most days, seven days a week, 9am–7pm, on Whitechapel Road.

Book an appointment

or call 020 7916 0029

Where to get help

Tower Bridge Hospital London

97–99 Whitechapel Road, London E1 1DT

020 7916 0029

WhatsApp **07903 284 189**

info@mhwclinic.co.uk

Open 7 days, 9am–7pm

In an emergency

Call 999, or go to the Royal London Hospital Emergency Department, Whitechapel Road, London E1 1FR.

When we are closed and it is not an emergency

Call NHS 111 or visit 111.nhs.uk.

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This leaflet is based on current NHS, NICE and Royal College of Ophthalmologists guidance on ocular foreign body and chemical eye injury. It is general information and does not replace advice from a clinician who has assessed you. If your symptoms change or you are worried, contact us on 020 7916 0029, call NHS 111, or call 999 in an emergency.

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