

FIRST AID FOR EYE INJURIES

A good general rule in treating eye injuries is to get professional care, fast! However, first-aid treatment also is important. Consider the following first aid tips for eye injuries.

The most common eye accident calling for first aid is something in the eye, such as a particle of dust, wood, glass, metal, concrete or any other hard substance. Chemical particles, vapor and radiant energy are other causes of eye injuries.

The natural impulse is to rub the eye. Don't! That can be the worst thing to do. Rubbing a hard, sharp particle against the delicate tissues that line the inside of the eye can cause more damage.

The following eye injury do's and don'ts are based on recommendations listed in the *American Red Cross First-Aid Textbook*. A copy should be available for quick reference in every workplace, home, store, office and school.

- Never rub the eye. Too often this will drive a foreign body deeper into the tissues and make removal difficult.
- Never examine an eye for a foreign body until you have washed your hands thoroughly. Otherwise, dirt might enter the eye and make the injury worse.
- Never be rough; this may aggravate the injury to the eyeball.
- Never remove a foreign body with a toothpick, match, knife blade, magnet or any other instrument.
- Always send the patient to a physician if the foreign body is embedded in the eye.

These measures can be taken and are often effective in removing a foreign body that is not actually embedded.

- 1) Pull down the lower eyelid and see if the body lies on the surface of the lid's lining membrane. If it does, it should be lifted off gently with a cotton swab or other applicator moistened with water. (Never use dry cotton around an eye.)
- 2) Grasp the lashes of the upper lid gently between the thumb and forefinger, have the patient look upward and pull the upper eyelid forward and downward over the lower eyelid. A foreign body on the lining membrane of the upper lid can often be dislodged and swept away by the tears.
- 3) Flush the eye out with clean water. This can be done with a small bulb syringe or with an eyedropper. Never, under any circumstances, should oil of any kind be used in first-aid treatment.

If the foreign body is still present or embedded in the eyeball, send the patient promptly to a physician. A retained foreign body may cause tissue changes and scars to develop; in some cases, this may cause loss of sight. Remember, inflammation in one eye may set up sympathetic inflammation in the other.

In case of a serious injury, a pad of clean cloth gauze or a sterile oval eye pad should be applied to the eye. Cover both eyes while the accident victim is en route to the physician's office.

- 4) If the accident victim is in deep shock or a coma, close the eyelids to prevent visual damage that might result from drying of the eyeballs. If the lids fail to stay closed, they should be covered with a gauze pad or held shut with adhesive tape.

WHAT TO DO IN CASE OF OTHER INJURIES TO THE EYELIDS

The best advice is to take the victim to a doctor immediately. Damage to the lids can result from non-expert care. The only recommended first-aid treatment is the application of a clean cloth or gauze pad, or a sterile oval eye pad, held in place with a firm bandage.

WHAT TO DO IN CASE OF BURN

Heat, chemicals, gases or chemical particles may cause burns to the eye. When an open flame approaches the eyes, the lids usually close involuntarily, fast enough so that only the lids are affected. Burns of the eyelid, however, can be serious; they may damage the tear ducts and cause scar tissue.

Chemicals, such as acids, alkalis, anhydrides and detergents, may spurt into the eyes before the lids can close, causing severe damage.

Immediately treat burns of the lids or eyes by flushing with clean water. Get large quantities of water gently into the eyes as quickly as possible.

The following is one flushing method:

Tilt the patient's head toward the injured side and then pour clean water slowly into the eye while you hold the lid open. Use an ordinary glass or cup or if available, a small funnel to direct the stream. The liquid should be poured into the inner corner of the eye and allowed to run over the eyeball and under the lid for at least 10 minutes; make sure all parts of the eye, corners and under the lid are flushed thoroughly. After flushing, a simple patch -- preferably, a sterile oval pad -- should be placed over the eye, or eyes, and the patient should be taken quickly to an eye physician. Use no medication in first-aid treatment.

In industrial workplaces, the use of proper PPE in conjunction with guards, engineering controls and sound manufacturing practices should be your first line of defense against employee eye injuries. Eyewash stations may also be required under certain circumstances.