

Look out

Common eye infections and injuries can lead to a corneal ulcer or inflammation of the cornea, which needs immediate attention from a qualified practitioner

BY DR PAAVAN KALRA

Our eyes are one of the most beautiful gifts nature has bestowed upon us. Windows for our perception, they receive nearly four fifths of all the impressions that our senses receive

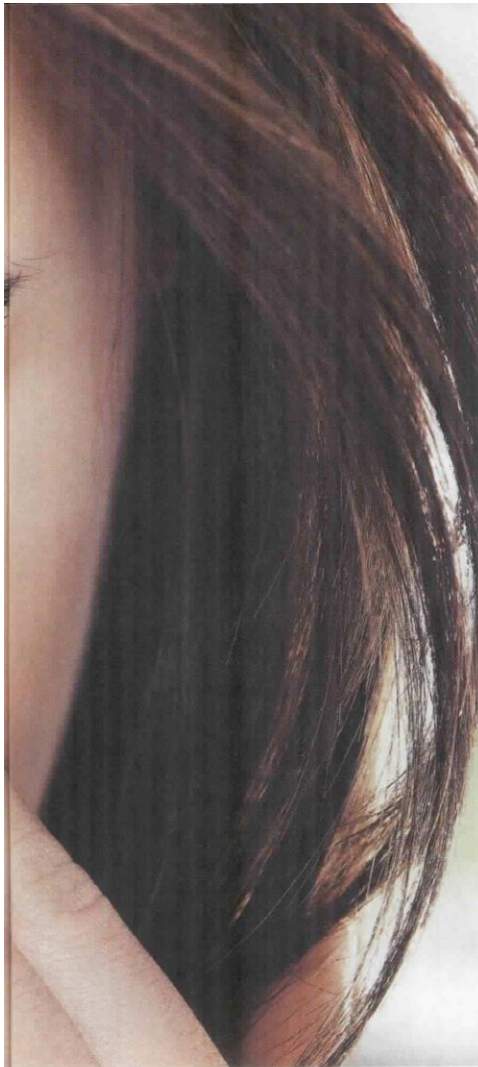
from the creation. However, in our day to day lives, we rarely wonder about the importance of good vision and the conditions which have a potential to threaten it. Severe diseases of the eye can impair the human existence in

many ways and one should be aware about them. Corneal ulcer (keratitis) is one such condition.

To put it in simple terms, cornea is a transparent layer which covers the front part of the eye and allows light to enter inside and stimulate the inner sensitive layers. Transparency of this layer may be lost because of various reasons and soreness (inflammation) is one of them. An open sore of the cornea is what we call a corneal ulcer.

Corneal ulcer is often accompanied by pain which can be debilitating. Eventually, it can lead to scarring in the cornea which continues to limit vision even after the ulcer is healed. An early and appropriate treatment, besides bringing down the pain, may reduce the extent of this scar, although it may

Eye Care



Tips to remember

- › Avoid injury to eye
- › Use protective glasses while engaging in outdoor activities like diving
- › If you are diagnosed with "dry eye", or your lids don't close completely use artificial tear drops, after consultation with your eye doctor
- › Do not ignore symptoms which suggest development of the ulcer
- › Avoid using home remedies and over the counter medicines for any eye condition
- › Avoid getting dust particles removed from the eyes by unqualified persons
- › Take proper care of contact lenses in case you use them
- › Always wash your hands before handling the lenses
- › Never use tap water to clean the lenses
- › Store the lenses in disinfecting solutions overnight
- › Regularly clean your contact lens case
- › Remove your lenses whenever your eyes are irritated and leave them out until your eyes feel better
- › Discard and replace the contact lenses at the interval specified by your doctor

not be possible to avoid it completely. Thus, recognition of the symptoms and consultation with an eye specialist on an emergency basis is of utmost importance.

Pain, sensitivity to light, irritation, excessive watering, discharge, redness of the eye in general, whitish appearance of cornea and reduced vision should alert one regarding the possibility of having developed this condition. One thing which needs to be emphasised here is that one should avoid using home remedies or self-medication with eye drops available over the counter, if one develops these symptoms.

Causes and treatment

A variety of factors can lead to the

development of corneal ulcer including infections by micro-organisms like bacteria, fungus, parasites and viruses. Injury to the eye may not always precede the development of the infection. However, injury with plant material like those during gardening or farming may put one at high risk of developing infection. Other major cause for infection is unhygienic practices adopted by unqualified persons for removal of dust particles from eyes. One may also be at risk if one is a contact lens user, especially if soft contact lenses are worn overnight or if homemade solutions are used for cleaning the lenses. In addition, dry eyes, eyelid disorders and injudicious use of steroid eye drops may also predispose you to the development of the ulcer.

In case someone develops corneal ulcer, the eye specialist will do a detailed examination and may perform some tests to know the cause and extent of spread of the infection. He may gently scrape the eye to take a small sample for testing and then based on the initial clinical judgment and the report, start the treatment. Eye drops against specific infections like bacteria, fungus, virus or acanthamoeba are prescribed along with supportive therapy like painkillers etc. Subsequently, treatment may be modified according to the availability of further reports and the clinical response to the initial therapy. Initially, the treating doctor may want to follow up the progress frequently and once response is seen, he may reduce the frequency of subsequent visits. Sometimes, the infection may be severe and may not respond to medicines alone and a decision for surgical removal may be taken. This procedure involves replacement of diseased cornea with healthy cornea obtained from a donated eye (corneal transplantation). The goal of the surgery at this stage is more towards stabilising the eye or getting rid of infection and preventing its recurrence rather than attainment of vision. Visual recovery after this procedure may take a long time and may require further surgeries.

Left untreated, a corneal ulcer or infection can permanently damage the cornea. Corneal ulcers may also perforate the eye, resulting in spread of the infection inside and increasing the risk of permanent visual problems and also loss of the eyeball. Knowing all the morbidity that this condition and its treatment may cause, it is best that a few precautions be taken to avoid it.

Healthy eyes enable us to enjoy the beauty of this world and live our lives to the fullest. Knowledge of conditions affecting the eyes and adoption of healthy practices help us to take care of not only our own eyes but also of our loved ones.

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