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First Aid for Eye Injuries

The most common type of eye injury that needs immediate action is a chemical burn. Alkaline materials (lye, plasters, cements, and ammonia), solvents, acids, and detergents can be harmful to the eye. Eyes should be flushed liberally and immediately with water if exposed to any of these agents.

If sterile solutions are readily available, use them to flush the affected eye. If not, go to the nearest sink, shower or hose and begin washing the eye with large amounts of water. If the eye has come in contact with an alkaline agent, it is important to flush the eye for ten minutes or more. Make sure water is getting under the upper and lower eyelids.

Abrasions or scratches of the eyelids or cornea, the clear covering of the eye, occur frequently and can be quite uncomfortable. If an eyelid abrasion is dirty, gently cleanse the area with a stream of clean water. Do not try to remove a foreign body from the eye itself except by gentle irrigation. Eye rinse solutions are available at stores.

Do not attempt to treat severe blunt trauma or penetrating injuries to the eye. Tape a paper or Styrofoam cup over the injured eye to shield and protect it until proper care can be obtained. Go to the hospital emergency room.

In the case of a blow to the eye, do not assume the injury is minor. The eye should be examined thoroughly by an ophthalmologist because vision-threatening damage could be hidden.

First aid is only the first step for emergency treatment. If you experience pain, impaired vision, or any possibility of eye damage, call your ophthalmologist or go the emergency room immediately.