

Patient information: Accident and Emergency

Ocular foreign body

What is an ocular foreign body?

An ocular foreign body is a common condition, in which a small particle (such as a piece of grit or small rust particle) becomes stuck on your eye. If the object becomes stuck on the cornea – the front window of your eye – this is called a corneal foreign body. If the object is stuck under your lid, this is called a sub-tarsal foreign body, which may cause scratches to the surface of your cornea. If a corneal foreign body is metal, a small ring of rust may form around it and this may also need to be removed.

What are the symptoms?

The surface of your eye contains many nerves, which makes it very sensitive to any scratch or foreign body on the front of your eye. Your eye may be painful, red, watery and light sensitive and your vision may be blurred.

What is the treatment?

The doctor or nurse will use local anaesthetic eye drops to numb your eye and will remove the foreign body with a cotton bud or a small sterile needle. The feeling of “something in the eye” or pain may return after the anaesthetic drops wear off, usually between 20 minutes to an hour later. The pain

usually lessens in a few days as your eye heals, but your eye may feel gritty for a few weeks. Anaesthetic drops cannot be prescribed to take home as regular use will slow down the healing of your eye. Pain relief such as paracetamol or ibuprofen (provided you have no medical reason which prevents you from using non-steroidal painkillers), are available over the counter at a chemist or on prescription and can be used to help with the pain.

Antibiotic drops or ointment may be prescribed to prevent infections from developing. Lubricants (artificial tear drops) are available on prescription or over the counter to help keep your eye comfortable while it heals. You may be asked to return for a follow-up appointment if there is any leftover foreign body or signs of infection/inflammation.

This video on the Moorfields YouTube channel demonstrates how to put in your eye drops:

<https://tinyurl.com/putting-in-drops>

