First Aid for Eye Injuries

The most common type of eye injury that needs immediate action is a chemical burn. Alkaline materials (lye, plaster, cement, and ammonia) can cause severe damage and even blindness. Solvents, acids, and detergents also can be very harmful to the eye. Eyes should be flushed liberally with water if exposed to any of these agents.

If sterile solutions or eye washes are readily available, use them to flush the affected eye. If not, go to the nearest sink, shower, or hose and immediately 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 at least 10 minutes or more before even considering going to the doctor. Make sure water is getting under the upper and lower eyelids. After at least 10 minutes of flushing, transport the patient to the nearest emergency room.

Abrasions or scratches of the eyelids and cornea, the clear covering of the eye, occur frequently and can be quite uncomfortable. If the abrasion is dirty, gently cleanse the area with a stream of clean water.

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 protect it until proper care can be obtained. Try to avoid strenuous activity if such an injury has occurred and seek proper medical care immediately.

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 (Eye M.D.) because vision-threatening damage such as an intraocular bleed or a retinal detachment 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.