

EYE-Q

by R. Thomas Barowsky, MD

Summertime First Aid for Your Eyes

July is National Fireworks Safety Month. In my last column I discussed with you about the safety issues related to fireworks just in time to dampen your July Fourth celebration. Inevitably, along with this renewal of our active outdoor lifestyle will come the usual cuts, scrapes and bruises of Summertime. Over the next two weeks I will help you get through your Summer without spending more time than necessary in the emergency department waiting room of your favorite hospital.

An eye injury usually consists of cuts, scrapes, or bruises on or near the eye. If you have an eye injury, you need to get medical care quickly to check your vision. Getting care right away can prevent loss of sight in many cases. Although first aid is helpful, it is difficult for you to know the extent of damage to the eye. Give first aid then seek medical care from your ophthalmologist, urgent care center or emergency department.

If you have a cut near the eye, first wash your hands. Put a clean cloth over the eyeball area to protect it. Then, use a clean cloth to wash the wound vigorously with liquid soap and water for 5 minutes. Rinse the wound well. Put pressure on the cut for 10 minutes with a sterile gauze to stop bleeding. Leave the area exposed to the air. Antiseptic ointments may be applied but make sure the ointment is intended for use in or around the eye.

If you suspect that the eyeball itself has been cut or punctured, do not attempt to clean or wash out the eye. You should tape a paper or styrofoam cup over your eye and go immediately to you ophthalmologist or emergency room. Do not put any pressure on the eye.

One of the more common injuries of a serious nature is the fishing hook to the face or eye injury. This usually results from a snagged hook that suddenly releases and comes sailing back at high speed. Occasionally it can be the result of a misdirected cast. The hook by itself can cause obvious injury if it becomes embedded in the skin or eye. However, a large leaded sinker moving at a high rate of speed can cause even greater injury.

Swelling usually follows injury to the tissues or bone around the eye. Apply cold compresses as much as possible for the first 24 hours. I usually recommend a bag of frozen peas that has been broken up like a beanbag. It not only avoids a dripping mess as it thaws but also answers the question of what's for dinner. Take acetaminophen or ibuprofen for pain if necessary. Don't be surprised if a black eye develops over the next 2 days. A bruise of the white of the eyeball (a subconjunctival hemorrhage) may also occur. These bruises may look bad, but they are harmless. They do not spread to inside the eye and clear up in about 2 weeks.

Be sure to contact your ophthalmologist, urgent care center or emergency room if you have severe or worsening eye pain, you still have eye pain or irritation 30 minutes after you have removed an object or if you have glass or a chemical in your eye.

Finally, after applying first aid to the injury seek care from your ophthalmologist, urgent care center or emergency room if there is any doubt about the extent of the injury.

If you have questions about your eye health e-mail Dr. Barowsky at doctom@tdkj.com and we'll try to answer your questions here at Eye-Q.