

## What should I do if I have any concerns?

If you notice any of the following problems please call the eye emergency helpline on **0300 019 4181**, 8am-6pm, Monday-Saturday and 8.30am-2pm on Sunday. Outside of these hours please contact the Emergency Department.

- Severe eye pain
- Light sensitivity
- Changes in vision
- No improvement after 48-72 hours of using the medication

# Chemical injury to the eye


## The Eye Unit

This leaflet is for patients who have had a chemical injury to the eye.




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## What is a chemical injury to the eye?

A chemical injury occurs when a liquid chemical makes contact with, or splashes, into the eye. The eyes can be injured by exposure to some chemicals. After exposure the eye should be washed out (irrigated) as soon as possible.

## What are chemical burns?

Chemical burns fall into three different categories - alkali burns, acid burns and irritants.

Common alkali substances contain the hydroxides of ammonia, caustic soda, potassium, magnesium and lime. These have a high level of alkaline and can penetrate the surface of the eye, causing more damage.

Acid burns result from chemicals with a low pH level and are usually less severe than alkali burns.

Irritants are substances that have a neutral pH and tend to cause more discomfort. These include things like cleaning products and shampoo etc.

## What are the symptoms of a chemical injury to the eye?

- Burning/stinging sensation
- Red eye
- Pain
- Reduced visual acuity/blurred vision
- Light sensitivity

## How is a chemical injury to the eye managed?

Early washing (irrigation) is really important in reducing the length of chemical exposure. The aim of irrigation is to remove the harmful substance and restore your eye's pH to a normal level. Anaesthetic eye drops are used for comfort during irrigation. An eye examination is performed to assess the extent of the injury.

Chemical eye injuries are an emergency and require immediate intervention for the best possible outcome. Chemical injuries to the eyes can result in serious damage to the eye surface and the front section (anterior segment) of the eye.

## What treatment will I be given?

A topical antibiotic ointment is usually prescribed to reduce the risk of infection. You may also be given drops to make the pupil bigger to help the eye to get better. In severe cases more intensive treatments will be used, but the nurse or doctor will advise you if this is necessary as it may require admission into hospital.

## How can I take care of myself?

Always wear appropriate safety goggles or safety glasses when handling chemical liquids, cleaning products, plaster, cement etc.

If the injury is severe and causing lots of pain and/or blurred vision, then it is not advisable to drive until this has got better.