SUPERFICIAL CORNEAL INJURY AND FOREIGN BODY

Corneal Abrasion
A corneal abrasion is a surface scratch, which damages the most superficial layer of cells on the cornea. This can be caused by almost anything, such as a hairbrush, a fingernail or a twig in the garden. They cause pain out of proportion to the degree of injury. The eye is watery, painful and sensitive to light.

Treatment of corneal abrasion
Corneal abrasions are treated by using antibiotic drops, pupil dilating drops, and the wearing of dark glasses. With this regime the eye settles quickly within a couple of days. Sometimes a pad may be placed on the affected eye, particularly following instillation of local anaesthetic and it is best not to drive as your insurance may be invalid for this period.

Recurrent corneal erosion
Following the healing of a corneal abrasion some patients unfortunately experience recurrent symptoms. This is typically noticed on waking first thing, when the eye suddenly becomes painful and watery for no obvious reason. This happens because the surface layer of cells, the epithelium, hasn’t healed firmly to the base of the corneal tissue. The treatment for this is the use of lubricating eye ointment last thing at night for at least three months. If this doesn’t do the trick some patients have a small scraping procedure of the corneal surface carried out at a clinic visit.

Corneal Foreign Body
Some corneal foreign bodies are non-specific, such as a piece of grit flying into the eye or a piece of plant material or a small piece of plastic. Mostly corneal foreign bodies are work-related injuries and involve the use of drilling, hammering or grinding metal. In these cases there will be a small fragment of metal or rust on the surface of the cornea. However, it is important to rule out the risk of piece of metal penetrating into the eyeball itself. This is done from the history and sometimes from an x-ray of the eye.

Metallic corneal foreign body will be flicked off the surface of the eye. In some cases some rust remnant needs to be scraped off after a further week or two. Antibiotic and pupil dilating drops will be given in the normal way.

Arc Eye or Welder’s Eye
This condition is caused by exposure to strong ultraviolet light during welding without proper protection. The history is normally that the welding took place earlier in the day and later that evening the eye becomes extremely painful. This is because the cell damage caused by the welding doesn’t affect the surface of the eye immediately. The treatment will consist of the usual antibiotic and dilating drops and may take several days to settle down.