

Something in your eye: what to do before you come in

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In short

Most things that get in the eye are small, such as dust, grit, metal or sawdust. They usually sit on the surface of the eye or under the eyelid. Try not to rub your eye, and gently flush it with clean water or sterile saline. If it does not come out, or your eye stays painful or blurry, call us. We remove foreign bodies here in the clinic, with urgent appointments where available.

Already had something removed? See [after foreign body removal](#).

⚠ Go now to the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital emergency department (32 Gisborne Street, East Melbourne, open 24 hours), or call 000, if:

- A chemical has splashed in your eye. Rinse it under cool running water for 15 to 20 minutes first, holding your eyelids open, and take out any contact lenses as soon as you can
- Something has pierced the eye, or there is a cut on the eye
- High-speed metal hit your eye, from hammering, drilling or grinding, and it is painful or your vision is blurry
- You have severe pain or a sudden loss of vision

Signs something is in your eye

- A gritty or scratchy feeling
- Pain or redness
- Watering

- Blurred vision

What to do now

1 Do not rub your eye.

Rubbing can scratch the surface.

2 Wash and dry your hands

before you touch your face.

3 Take out contact lenses

if you wear them, unless the surface of your eye looks badly damaged.

4 Look for it.

Look up and gently pull your lower eyelid down. If you can see the speck, lift it off with the corner of a clean, damp cloth.

5 Check under the upper lid.

If you cannot see it, gently lift your upper eyelid. Blinking may help move it towards the corner of the eye.

6 Flush the eye

gently with clean water or sterile saline from a pharmacy. Let the water run from the inner corner of the eye outwards.

7 Still there?

Cover the eye loosely and call us.

Do

- ✓ Flush gently with clean water or sterile saline
- ✓ Keep your hands clean
- ✓ Wear your glasses instead of contact lenses until your eye is checked

Don't

- ✗ Rub your eye
- ✗ Put drops, ointment or any medicine in your eye before you are seen
- ✗ Try to remove something that is stuck in your eye

What happens at the clinic

Call us first on **(03) 9702 9118**. We see urgent eye problems the same day where available, or tell you if you need to go to emergency.

- Your optometrist examines your eye to find what is there and where it sits.
- Numbing drops go in before anything is removed.
- Our optometrists are trained and equipped to remove foreign bodies embedded in the cornea, the clear front of the eye.
- You go home with aftercare instructions, and a follow-up visit if needed.

For what to expect afterwards, see **after foreign body removal**.

Why it is worth getting checked

Most small injuries to the eye heal by themselves, and minor ones, such as dust or shampoo, often settle within 24 hours. If something stays in the eye, though, it can cause an infection or scarring. A scratch that does not heal can turn into an ulcer.

Protecting your eyes

Things often get in the eye while drilling, cutting, grinding, woodwork, gardening or cleaning. Wear wrap-around goggles or a face visor when there is a chance of something flying into your eyes, and goggles when using pool chemicals, acids or bleach. Safety glasses that meet Australian Standards help protect your eyes at work and at home. Ask us about **workplace safety glasses**.

When to call us on (03) 9702 9118

Call the same day if:

- It still feels like something is in your eye after flushing
- You can see something stuck on the eye. Leave it in place
- The pain is getting worse
- Your vision is blurred, or you can see black spots
- There is a coloured discharge, or blood, from the eye
- You can see a white or yellow spot on the eye
- Your eye is not better in one to two days

Call (03) 9702 9118

If something is in your eye, call us on (03) 9702 9118 or book online. See urgent eye care for how urgent visits work.

FAQs

— Can an optometrist remove something from my eye?

Yes. Our optometrists are trained and equipped to remove foreign bodies, including ones embedded in the cornea. Numbing drops go in first. Call us on (03) 9702 9118 so we can book you in.

— Should I rinse my eye with water?

Yes. Flush it gently with clean water or sterile saline. For a chemical splash, rinse under cool running water for 15 to 20 minutes, then get help straight away.

— Can I use eye drops before I come in?

No. Do not put drops, ointment or any medicine in your eye before it has been checked.

— **What if I can see something stuck in my eye?**

Leave it in place and do not try to remove it yourself. Call us straight away. If you cannot reach us, go to the emergency department.

— **What happens after it is removed?**

Your eye may feel scratchy for a day or two. See **after foreign body removal** for aftercare and warning signs.
