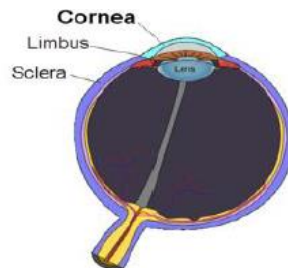


FAST FACTS: Eye Pain

Eye pain and visual impairment can be associated with serious health consequences for older adults, including limitations in physical activity, impaired mobility, and poor balance and gait. **Assessment of common eye conditions in older people is crucial to identify symptoms and intervene early.** Many eye disorders share common presenting symptoms, **namely some degree of eye pain/discomfort and a red eye.**

Normal Changes of the Aging Eye:

- Tear production decreases; predisposing to dry eye.
- Can have a gray-white ring around the “color” part of the eye; no significance (see photo on the right).
- Sensitivity of eye is diminished; may lead to corneal damage, “floaters” common.
- Pupil shows diminished/reactivity to light (constriction) and in dark (dilation) is slower; help.
- Cloudy areas in the lens of the eye or cataracts are associated with aging.

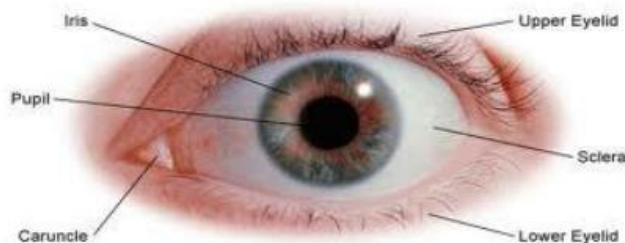


Recognition/Assessment

- Pain: onset, location, duration, character (quality/severity; foreign body sensation; acute vs. chronic), and radiation.
- Any precipitating factors (triggers), trauma, or similar symptoms?
- Associated symptoms: fever, **visual complaint** (be it transient, deteriorating, or improving), **headache**, **nausea**, not eating, fatigue, cough, change in mentation, or dizziness.

Observe/assess the lids, conjunctiva, cornea, iris, and pupils for the following:

- Lids: swelling, changes in skin color, excessive watering
- Conjunctiva: redness and discharge
- Cornea: cloudiness, ulceration, foreign body
- Iris: compare each/same color?
- Pupils: pupils should constrict and dilate rhythmically to light (though often slow)



Compare your findings to this eye disorder chart:

History	Observation	Potential	Intervention
Sudden severe pain in and around eye with nausea, visual loss	Red tender eye, fixed mid-dilated pupil, headache over affected eye	Angle-closure glaucoma	Emergency: call 911 per protocol and notify provider
Pain, visual loss, intense light sensitivity, (can affect both)	Tender eye, pronounced redness around cornea, fixed small pupil	Acute Iritis	Urgent call to provider
Mild-moderate itching, burning, grittiness, little/no effect on vision	Red eye with discharge (sticky lids), watery (viral); purulent (bacterial)	Conjunctivitis Blepharitis	Gentle cleansing/notify provider
Pain, light sensitivity, foreign body sensation, tearing	Generalized redness	Corneal abrasion, superficial injury to the cornea/often due to dry eyes	Call provider
Painful rash forehead to upper lid/side of nose (one side only)	Grouped red pustules, cornea may have opacity; associated with shingles	Herpes Zoster Ophthalmicus	Keep skin clean/ Urgent call to provider
Gradual peripheral vision and central vision distorted	Older adults describe difficulty seeing on either side and or in the middle of their eyes	Age-Related Macular Degeneration	Notify provider

Assessment Tool:

Numeric and faces pain assessment tools can be found: <https://geriatricpain.org/cognitively-intact>.

Interventions

- Recognition is critical. All eye complaints warrant immediate assessment to preserve vision and avert complications. See specific interventions in table to rapidly notify provider/call 911.
- Non-pharmacologic: maintain a calm environment and provide staff (family) support.
- Conduct frequent reassessments.
- Consult a pharmacist or provider to identify potential medications contributing to eye diseases.
- Older adults should have routine eye exams by an ophthalmologist annually and more often with certain eye diseases.

Revised December 2023

References

Reuben DB, Herr KA, Pacala JT, Pollock BG, Potter JP, Semla TP. Geriatrics at Your Fingertips. 25th Pg. 126-135. New York: The American Geriatrics Society; 2023. ISBN: 978-1-886775-77-0.