



Health Tips for Parents

MAY 2018 | VOLUME 142

Preventing sports-related eye injuries

Each year, more than 13,000 children suffer sports-related eye injuries, and most of those injuries are preventable with proper eye protection.

Types of injuries

Sports is the leading cause of eye injury in school-age children, says Monica Khitri, MD, UCLA pediatric ophthalmologist at Doheny Eye Center UCLA in Pasadena and Arcadia. “Most of the injuries happen in baseball and basketball, but hockey, lacrosse, tennis, wrestling, football and soccer are also high risk,” Dr. Khitri says. “Most often, an eye injury occurs when a ball, bat, finger or elbow strikes the child’s face.” The most common symptoms of an eye injury are pain, eye redness, and blurred or double vision.

Depending on the impact, injuries may range from relatively minor to severe:

- Eyelid scratches and bruising
- Bone fractures around the eye
- Nerve or muscle damage
- Cuts/scratches on the eye, bleeding inside the eye (hyphema) or retinal detachment (signs include floaters, reduced vision, light sensitivity)

Do not delay treatment

In the event of an injury, do not apply any pressure on the injured eye or allow your child to rub their eyes. Contact their doctor immediately for medical guidance.

“If left untreated or there is a delay in treatment, serious eye injuries can lead to permanent loss of vision or loss of the eye itself,” Dr. Khitri says. “Often, the earlier that a child is seen and treated, the better their chances of recovery.” Your doctor will carefully examine both eyes (inside and out), assess your child’s vision and check for functional changes — how the eye moves and reacts. If more advanced care is required, you will be referred to a specialist.

For less severe injuries, such as minor bruising (a “black eye”), your doctor may suggest self-care at home, including gently placing a cold compress on their eye to reduce the swelling and pain. For more serious injuries, your child’s doctor may recommend eye drops, oral medications or if necessary, surgery.

Eye protection tips

- **Schedule an eye exam** before they start a sport. If they can’t see, they can’t duck the puck or dodge the ball.
- **Pick sport-specific eye guards.** It is important that the guard fits your child.
- **Buy prescription glasses made of polycarbonate plastic,** which is 10 times more impact-resistant than regular lenses.
- **For contact sports, choose eye guards/glasses with padding at the nose and brow.**



The importance of protective eyewear

“Wearing protective eyewear is the most effective way to prevent sports-related eye injuries. Since most youth sports leagues do not require eye protection, it is really up to parents and coaches to encourage players to use them,” Dr. Khitri says. “And the more children see their peers wearing them, the more likely they are to use them too.”