

From cucumber to camomile – your eye health SOS

We examine common problems and ask the experts when to call in the professionals...

by **Beatrice Aidin**

ONE of the most painful events of my life – I still squirm at the thought – was a papercut to my cornea. If there was a time to call in the experts, this was it and I was lucky enough to be rushed to Moorfields Eye Hospital where numbing eyedrops, a fetching pirate patch and patience were prescribed.

Yes, this was a clumsy one-off, I hope, but which organic optical issues need a trip to your pharmacist, GP, optician, ophthalmologist or beyond?

'Everyday symptoms like mild dryness from screens or a little redness after a long day can often be soothed at home with lubricating drops from a pharmacy,' says Dr Rachna Murthy, co-founder of FaceRestoration and an ophthalmologist and oculoplastic and reconstructive surgeon medical aesthetic practitioner.

'Symptoms that escalate or fail to improve after basic home treatment may signal underlying problems such as infection, inflammation, retinal issues or even glaucoma – conditions that can jeopardise sight if not addressed quickly.'

However, some warning signs demand a specialist's attention.

'If you notice sudden blurry vision, eye pain, double vision, sensitivity to light, flashes or floaters, persistent redness, discharge or difficulty seeing at night, it's time to book a comprehensive eye exam and let the experts investigate,' says Dr Murthy.

'Sudden and severe headaches with visual changes, foreign objects or

chemical exposure to the eye and swelling or blood with pus are emergencies, so seek care immediately.

'Even persistent dry eyes and ongoing fatigue warrant a professional review, as these can reflect tear gland disease, autoimmune issues or eyelid abnormalities.'

On the subject of foreign objects, Nicola Alexander-Cross – an optometrist and founder of Peep Club – says that if you have eyelash extensions, take a break every four to six months for a few weeks to give eyes the chance to rebalance.

Given that impurities and dust can get trapped between the false lashes causing infection, 'follow the aftercare advice to tee, regularly cleansing your eyes with an anti-bacterial makeup remover', she says. With any signs of trouble, go first to your pharmacist and they can advise if you need to see your GP or optometrist.

'When in doubt, don't wait,' says Dr Murthy. 'Vision lost is often vision that can't be restored and eye care professionals are trained to help you in these emergencies.'

'The eye is complex – only expert assessment can rule out serious disease, prescribe effective treatments and protect sight for years to come.'

Dr Sabrina Shah-Desai's guide to common eye conditions

Dry eye

SYMPTOMS: Gritty, burning or sore

sensations, redness, blurred vision and sensitivity to light.

TREATMENT: Avoid anything that can aggravate dryness, such as contact lenses and smoke. Try not to scratch or rub eyes. For instant but temporary relief, place cool cucumber slices or cold camomile tea bags on the eyes, but ask your pharmacist for advice.

Iritis

SYMPTOMS: Eye redness, discomfort, pain or achiness in the affected eye, light sensitivity and decreased vision.

TREATMENT: This is a common condition, which occurs when the iris is inflamed. Visit an ophthalmologist as soon as you notice any symptoms, because if left untreated it can cause temporary blindness. If it's spotted early, it can be treated with anti-inflammatory medications.

Conjunctivitis

SYMPTOMS: Eye redness, burning, itching, watering and a yellow discharge.

TREATMENT: Conjunctivitis is extremely contagious, so be careful not to touch your other eye – ensure you frequently wash your hands to help prevent spreading the infection.

Stop wearing contact lenses until the symptoms resolve and apply a cool or warm compress to the eye, while over-the-counter chemist creams can clear it up.

If you have any symptoms, such as blurred vision, sensitivity to light or changes in vision, contact your GP or an optician.

