

Irritated Eyes?

Don't Brush Them Off

We're busy enough as it is. So, when minor health annoyances strike, it's tempting to brush them off as nothing to worry about. A trip to the doctor? What a pain.

But, when it comes to your eyes, the real pain could come in not listening to what they're telling you. Even something like pink eye should prompt a quick trip to your eye doctor. Dr. Allison M.B. Schulte, O.D., shares more.

"The most helpful response to pink eye is to see your eye doctor," says Dr. Schulte, who practices in the Detroit, Mich., area. "If your eye is red, it's talking to you — and you need to listen!

And sometimes, the message can be hidden.

"In recent years, I've treated several patients with red eyes who thought they had a minor viral or bacterial infection, which can cause pink eye — but who actually had a sliver of metal in their eye from working with machinery or gardening in the backyard."

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Pink eye is more a nuisance than a danger, and isn't in the habit of robbing eyesight. But treatment still helps — even when the culprit is a virus. In the most common cases of pink eye, a virus attacks the eyes' surfaces and inner eyelids. Redness, itching and clear drainage result. It's true that no drop is going to cure a virus, but the drops your eye doctor can prescribe can lessen the symptoms and make you less miserable.

When bacteria cause pink eye, you'll know it because your eyelids are typically "glued" shut in the morning. For this, there are various antibiotic drops that should do the treatment trick.

Your eye doctor would also want to know if "floaters" were finding their way into your vision. Floaters form in the gel-like substance between your retina and your lens. This gel, formally known as vitreous humor, is clear when we're born. But, as we age, tiny specks of it lose transparency. Those specks cast shadows on the retina, and that's what you see "floating."

"Most of the time, floaters don't pose a threat to good eye health," says Dr. Schulte. "But they can also signal the presence of a more serious condition — especially if they appear suddenly or are accompanied by flashes of light. Such symptoms could indicate the presence of a detached retina, which is a sight-threatening condition. In that situation, you need to seek medical attention from your eyecare doctor immediately."