

Eye Unit

Subconjunctival Haemorrhage

What is the conjunctiva?

- The conjunctiva is the thin, moist, transparent tissue that covers the white part of the eye (called the sclera) and the inside of the eyelids. The conjunctiva is the outermost protective coating of the eyeball.
- The conjunctiva contains many tiny blood vessels. These blood vessels are usually hardly visible and are somewhat fragile meaning their walls may break easily.

What is a Subconjunctival haemorrhage?

A Subconjunctival haemorrhage occurs when these fragile blood vessels leak, causing a small amount of blood to gather between the sclera and conjunctiva. This appears as a bright red or dark red patch on the white of the eye.

What causes a Subconjunctival haemorrhage?

Often there is no cause. Most subconjunctival haemorrhages are painless and may only be discovered when looking in the mirror or noticed first by another person seeing a red spot or patch on the white of your eye.

The following can occasionally be the cause:

- Sneezing, coughing, straining or vomiting
- Increasing the pressure in the veins of the head, as in weight lifting or other physical exertion.
- Eye rubbing or inserting contact lenses
- Certain infections of the outside of the eye (conjunctivitis) where a virus or a bacteria weaken the walls of small blood vessels under the conjunctiva
- Trauma /Injury to the head or eye or after eye or eyelid surgery
- Occasionally it can be associated with diabetes or hypertension or taking blood thinning medication such as Warfarin or Aspirin

What are signs and symptoms?

Very rarely people experience pain when the haemorrhage begins. When the bleeding first occurs, you may notice a sense of fullness in the eye or under the lid. As the haemorrhage resolves, some people may feel very mild irritation of the eye or merely a sense of awareness of the eye.

- The haemorrhage itself is an obvious, sharply outlined bright red area overlying the white of the eye. The entire white part of the eye may occasionally be covered by blood (bloodshot).
- The haemorrhage will appear larger within the first 24 hours after its onset and then will slowly decrease in size as the blood is absorbed.

See your GP if your subconjunctival haemorrhage does not get better within two weeks or if it has happened multiple times. Also seek medical advice if you have a haemorrhage in both eyes at the same time or if the subconjunctival haemorrhage coincides with a new onset of easy bruising or bleeding gums.

Seek medical help immediately if the subconjunctival haemorrhage is associated with

- Pain.
- Changes in vision (for example, blurry vision, double vision, difficulty seeing).
- A history of recent injury or trauma.
- A history of bleeding disorder, or a history of high blood pressure.

What is the treatment?

Usually, no treatment is needed. Over-the-counter artificial tears can be applied to the eye **if mild irritation is present**. The eye does not require a patch.

This condition clears by itself within one to two weeks. Recovery is usually complete, without any long-term problems, similar to a mild bruise under the skin.

Can a Subconjunctival haemorrhage be prevented?

If you are having frequent subconjunctival haemorrhages or your subconjunctival haemorrhage is associated with easy bruising or bleeding elsewhere, you should have a medical assessment for an underlying

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bleeding or clotting problem. Treatment of such an underlying condition may prevent future haemorrhages.

For further information please contact your GP

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