

Patient information: accident and emergency

Subconjunctival haemorrhage

A subconjunctival haemorrhage is a bleed underneath the conjunctiva- the transparent layer which lies over the white of the eye (the sclera). This bleeding is caused by the leaking of a blood vessel in the conjunctiva.

Signs and symptoms

The haemorrhage usually appears suddenly as a red patch or spot on the white of the eye. It may be flat or occasionally slightly raised above the surface of the eye. It is usually painless and does not affect your eyesight, but it can sometimes cause an ache or discomfort in your eye. Sometimes, you might not notice it until somebody draws your attention to it.

Causes

Subconjunctival haemorrhages are very common because the blood vessels in the conjunctiva are very fragile and can easily bleed a little. In most cases, there is no specific cause but the following are associated with the condition: strenuous activities (like carrying heavy shopping bags or lifting heavy things), coughing and sneezing,

vomiting, high blood pressure and taking blood-thinning medications such as aspirin or warfarin.

Other potential causes include injury to the eye or rubbing the eye forcefully. A subconjunctival haemorrhage can also happen following an eye operation.

What will happen at hospital?

The doctor or nurse practitioner will check your vision, examine your eye with a slit lamp, and check your blood pressure if necessary.

Treatment

This condition usually does not require any treatment and will settle by itself within a week or two. If your eye is uncomfortable, lubricating eye drops may be recommended.

Please note: if you have repeated subconjunctival haemorrhages, you should inform your GP.

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