



Herpes Simplex Eye Disease

What is herpes simplex?

Herpes simplex is a virus that can infect your skin, nerves and tissue. It can infect your eyes, irritating them and causing blurry vision.

There are two major types of the herpes simplex virus. Both types can affect the eye.

Type I: This is the most common type. It is very contagious (easily spread from person to person). It usually infects the face, causing cold sores or fever blisters. Type I usually affects the eyes. If you touch a cold sore or blister, then touch your eye, the infection may spread.

Type II is a type of herpes that is spread by sexual contact, infecting a person's genitals.

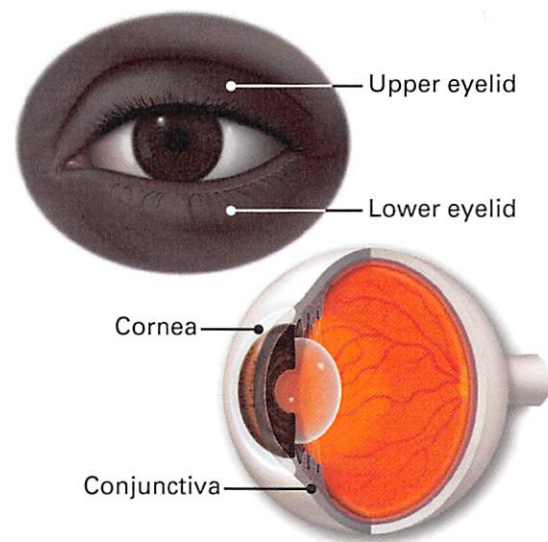
Eye Words to Know

Conjunctiva: Clear tissue covering the white part of your eye and the inside of your eyelids.

Cornea: Clear, dome-shaped window of the front of your eye. It focuses light into your eye.

How herpes simplex affects the eyes

Herpes simplex eye disease can infect the eyelids, the conjunctiva and the cornea.



Infection usually begins on the surface of the cornea. This is called **herpes keratitis**. Your eye turns red and becomes sore and sensitive to light. The infection can spread deeper into the cornea, causing swelling inside the eye. It can also scar the cornea. Sometimes, open sores (called ulcers) form on the cornea. These can be very difficult to heal. All of these problems can affect your vision, making it blurry or hazy.

Once you have herpes simplex, the virus stays in your body. The virus can be dormant (inactive) until something causes it to be active again. This is when symptoms like cold sores and fever blisters come back. This can happen weeks, months, or even years after you first have herpes

simplex. Here are some reasons why it might come back:

- Feeling stressed
- Being out in the sun
- Having an illness with a high fever
- Getting injured or having surgery
- For women, having your period (menstruation)
- Taking certain medicines (such as corticosteroids and cyclosporines)

What are herpes simplex eye disease symptoms?

Symptoms of herpes simplex eye disease include:

- Eye pain, redness, or swelling
- Eye irritation
- Watering eyes
- Being very sensitive to bright light
- Blurry vision

How is herpes simplex eye disease treated?

There is no cure for herpes. Once the virus is in your body, you cannot get rid of it. However, it is important to treat herpes simplex eye disease. Otherwise, the virus can lead to serious eye problems and possible vision loss.

Here are treatments for herpes simplex eye disease:

- For a mild infection, you may be prescribed antiviral eye drops or pills. These can help you heal more quickly.
- Your ophthalmologist may gently scrape diseased cells from your cornea to improve your vision.
- For severe infection that has scarred your cornea, you may need a corneal transplant. All or part of your cornea is replaced with a healthy, clear donor cornea.

Keeping herpes simplex eye disease from coming back

- If you have an active cold sore or fever blister, don't touch your eyes. Wash your hands frequently.
- Do not use steroid eye drops. They can make your eye infection worse. Only use eye drops prescribed for the herpes infection. Tell your doctor if you have been using eye drops for any other reasons.
- Ask your eye doctor if you can wear your contact lenses. They might say not to if you have had this eye disease more than once.

Summary

Herpes simplex is a virus that can infect your skin, nerves and tissue. If it infects your eyes, they become red, sore and sensitive to light. Vision can become blurry.

The herpes virus cannot be cured, but herpes simplex eye symptoms must be treated right away. You may be prescribed antiviral eye drops or pills to help you heal more quickly. If your vision is severely affected, your ophthalmologist may gently scrape diseased cells from your cornea to improve your sight. If the herpes simplex infection has scarred your cornea, you may need a corneal transplant.

If you have any questions about your eyes or your vision, speak with your ophthalmologist. He or she is committed to protecting your sight.

Get more information about herpes from EyeSmart—provided by the American Academy of Ophthalmology—at aao.org/herpes-link.

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