



Bacterial Keratitis

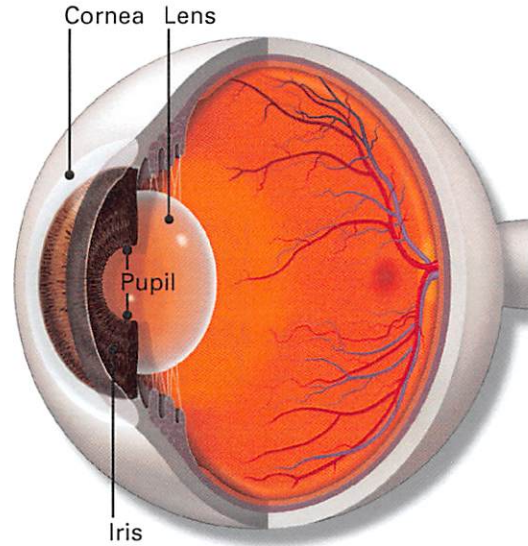
What is bacterial keratitis?

Bacterial keratitis is an infection of the cornea. The cornea is the clear, dome-shaped window of the front of your eye.

Bacterial keratitis usually develops quickly. Left untreated it can cause blindness.

There are many different bacteria that cause keratitis. The two bacteria most commonly responsible for this type of infection in the U.S. are:

- *Staphylococcus aureus*
- *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*.



What are symptoms of bacterial keratitis?

Symptoms of bacterial keratitis may include:

- pain in the eye (often sudden)
- reduced vision
- increased light sensitivity
- excessive tearing
- discharge from your eye

Call your ophthalmologist right away if you have any of these symptoms. This is especially important if they come on suddenly. If not treated, a bacterial keratitis eye infection can lead to blindness. Treatment must start right away to prevent vision loss.

What causes bacterial keratitis?

The two main causes of bacterial keratitis are:

- contact lens use, especially extended-wear lenses
- eye injury

You risk an infection from contact lenses if you wear them too long or do not take care of them correctly. Proper care of your contacts will lower your risk of developing a keratitis infection.

Prevent infection with proper contact lens care

Follow your eye care provider's instructions to wear, clean and store your contacts. These are some things to keep in mind:

- Wash your hands with soap and water and dry them with a lint-free towel before handling your contacts.
- Minimize contact with water. Remove lenses before going swimming or in a hot tub.
- Do not rinse or store your contacts in water (tap or sterile water).
- Do not put your lenses in your mouth to wet them.
- Do not use saline solution and rewetting drops to disinfect lenses. Neither is an effective or approved disinfectant.
- Follow your eye care professional's schedule for wearing and replacing your contacts.
- Use the "rub and rinse" method to clean your contacts. Rub your contact lenses with your fingers, then rinse them with solution before soaking. Use this method even if the solution you are using is a "no-rub" variety.
- Rinse the contact lens case with fresh solution — not water. Then leave the empty case open to air dry.
- Keep the contact lens case clean and replace it regularly, at least every three months. Lens cases can be a source of contamination and infection. Do not use cracked or damaged lens cases.
- Do not re-use old solution or "top off" the solution in your lens case.
- Do not transfer contact lens solution into smaller travel-size containers.
- Do not allow the tip of the solution bottle to touch any surface. Keep the bottle tightly closed when not in use.
- Never wear your lenses after storage for 30 or more days without disinfecting them again.

How is a bacterial keratitis treated?

To diagnose bacterial keratitis, your ophthalmologist will discuss your symptoms with you. They may gently scrape the eye to take a small sample and test it for infection.

Bacterial keratitis is usually treated with antibiotic drops. Drops are usually put in frequently. Treatment may also involve steroid drops. You may need to return to your ophthalmologist several times.

If you and your ophthalmologist find and treat bacterial keratitis early, you may preserve your vision. In severe cases, decreased vision or blindness may be the result. This is also true if the infection affects the center of the cornea. Sometimes a cornea transplant is needed to restore vision.

Summary

Bacterial keratitis is an infection of the cornea. It usually develops quickly. It is usually caused by contact lens wear or eye injury. Left untreated it can cause blindness.

If you wear contact lenses, proper care will lower your risk of developing a keratitis infection.

If you have any of these symptoms, call your ophthalmologist right away:

- pain in the eye (often sudden)
- reduced vision
- increased light sensitivity
- excessive tearing
- discharge from your eye

If you and your ophthalmologist find and treat bacterial keratitis early, you may preserve your vision.

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 bacterial keratitis from EyeSmart—provided by the American Academy of Ophthalmology—at aao.org/bacterial-keratitis-link.

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