

Recurrent corneal erosion (RCE)

This leaflet provides information about the treatment for recurrent corneal erosion. If you have any questions or concerns please speak to your eye specialist.

What is RCE?

Recurrent corneal erosion (RCE) is a condition affecting the surface layer (epithelium) of the cornea. The problem is caused when the bottom layer of epithelial cells does not stick well to the cornea, causing them to pull off easily. The pain and discomfort is often quite intense and similar to a condition called corneal abrasion.

What are the signs and symptoms of RCE?

- Severe pain (usually upon waking).
- Blurred vision.
- Feeling of having a foreign body in the eye.
- Dryness and irritation.
- Tearing.
- Redness.
- Sensitivity to light.

Upon awakening, patients often experience severe pain, blurred vision and light sensitivity caused by the eyelid pulling the loosened epithelial cells of the cornea. After the cornea heals, the problem recurs again unless the condition is treated.

Recurrent corneal erosion may affect one or both eyes, depending on the underlying cause.

What can cause RCE?

- Previous trauma to the eye
- Dehydration
- Smoking
- Alcohol
- Dry eyes
- Dry environments
- Contact lens wearing

How is RCE treated?

Artificial tear drops or ointment are usually prescribed as the first line of treatment. This helps the epithelium to stick better to the lower layer of the cornea. Artificial tears are also recommended to keep the cornea moist and more comfortable.

Those patients with underlying corneal dystrophy may require additional treatment. This usually involves a procedure where the epithelium is either gently removed or microscopic ‘spot welds’ are made to the cornea to encourage the epithelial cells to stick securely to the lower layer.

Contacting us

If you have a minor eye problem, please seek advice from your GP, optician or pharmacist. If urgent, please attend Eye Casualty or call 111.

Eye Casualty (Reading):	Mon-Fri 9am to 5pm; Sat & Sun & bank holidays 9am-12.30pm; Closed Christmas Day and New Year’s Day.
Eye Casualty: Prince Charles Eye Unit (Windsor):	Mon-Fri 9am to 5pm; Sat 9am-12.30pm; Closed Sun & bank holidays.
Dorrell Ward (Reading):	0118 322 7172 (24 hours a day)
Eye Day Unit (Reading):	0118 322 7123 (Mon-Fri 7am to 6pm)

Outside of Eye Casualty hours, you should telephone your GP’s out of hours’ service, ring NHS 111 or if you have serious concerns, visit your nearest Emergency Department (A&E).

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

M Leyland, RBFT Ophthalmology, February 2023. Next review due: February 2025

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