

Emergencies—Are You Prepared?

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Emergencies—earthquakes, fires and power outages to name a few—leave us injured at worst and inconvenienced at best. Preparation makes a difference in how adversely we are impacted and how quickly we recover.

It takes a little advanced planning to create an emergency preparedness kit. This kit should be in a sturdy container stored outside the home. Items such as clothing, water, and canned food are vital in an emergency. A flashlight, spare batteries, names of emergency contacts and medicines, and a book or two are also good ideas.

For those who require vision correction, spare glasses are an essential item in the kit. Glasses can be lost or broken during an emergency. Good vision makes waiting for resumption of services more tolerable, and can even be vital to survival or rescue.

It is also a good idea to keep a spare pair of glasses in the glove box of your car. We are usually near our car but often away from home. Losing glasses leaning over the side of the ferry or in a car accident can make driving dangerous and vacations miserable.

Even if contacts are your primary method of vision correction, getting something in the eye or the sudden onset of eye allergies can make contact lens wear impossible. Extra contact solution and a case are helpful if one has to remove the lenses. It is also a good idea to stick an extra pair of contacts in the suitcase before leaving on vacation.

Most injuries to the eye are prevented by our body's automatic protective response. However, sometimes the eye is unable to protect itself from superficial injury. Having several individual-dose vials of artificial tears handy can help to soothe and lubricate the eye. Superficial scratches often heal within a few hours. Wearing safety eyewear prevents a Sunday afternoon hobby from turning into a trip to the emergency room. Prescription safety eyewear is available and may be billable to insurance. If a small piece of debris lodges in the eye, copious flushing can sometimes knock it loose. Be prepared, however, for a small amount of pain to remain until healing occurs. Actual removal of an embedded foreign object requires an eye doctor's care.

Direct impact to the eye rarely happens because our bony skull provides protection to the eye area. Black eyes are common since the face is well-supplied with blood vessels. Traumatic bleeding inside the eye, known as hyphema, is rare. It can happen when something small like a ping pong ball or a fist bypasses the skull and makes actual contact with the eye. Although vision might not be affected, and the eye may not be outwardly scratched, internal damage can occur.

Many eye injuries require dilation to keep the eye calm until healing can begin. If the eyeball has an open wound an antibiotic protects from secondary infection. A bandage contact lens can help with pain and speed healing. Rest is also very important to allow the body to recover. If simple treatments do not work quickly, see an eye doctor. Special equipment is used to assess the extent of an injury as well as to prompt it to heal as rapidly as possible. It is always a good idea to be adequately prepared and informed when confronted with an emergency. Our eyesight and the health of our eyes should be no exception.

Dr. Scarbrough is the owner of Eagle Eye Vision Care in downtown Woodinville.