



**Royal Berkshire**  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Recurrent corneal erosion (RCE)

Information for patients

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Recurrent corneal erosion is a condition affecting the surface layer of the eye (the cornea). This layer is called the epithelium. The problem is caused when the bottom layer of epithelial cells don't 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.

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### What causes RCE?

There is usually an underlying disorder that causes the recurrent corneal erosions to happen. The most common of these are: previous injury to the cornea (corneal abrasion), corneal dystrophy (a rare condition in which the transparency of the cornea is affected), or corneal disease causing repeated breakdown of the epithelial cells.

### Signs and symptoms of RCE

- Severe pain (especially after awakening).
- 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.

### Contributing factors of RCE

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

### What is the treatment for RCE?

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.

Patients who continue to suffer from recurrent corneal erosions, despite treatment, may benefit from laser surgery. This involves removal of the surface layer of the corneal cells to encourage proper healing.

## Contacting us

If you have got a minor eye problem, please seek advice from your GP, optician or pharmacist. If you think your problem might be urgent, please attend Eye Casualty.

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
Dorrell Ward (Reading):	0118 322 7172 (24 hours a day)
Eye Day Unit (Reading):	0118 322 7123 (Mon-Fri 7am to 6pm)

Visit the Trust website at [www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk](http://www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk)

This document can be made available in other languages and formats upon request.

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