



PRESS RELEASE

TO: Editor in Charge

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CORNEA 101

Information You Never Knew Before About the Cornea

(Honolulu, Hawaii), March 5, 2012 – We use our eyes every day, in almost every daily activity and when we have problems, big or small, with our eyes, it can make daily activities more challenging. It is important to understand each part of the eye, its function and some potential problems that can occur. Dr. Christopher Tortora, Medical Director at the Hawaiian Eye Center is able to share a lot of useful information about the cornea, probably a part of the eye that is not described often, partly because it is very difficult to see. The cornea is the outmost layer of the eye. It covers the front of the eye that is clear and has a dome shaped surface. It is somewhat like the crystal on a watch. You know it's covering the watch face, but you don't really see it. Two problems that affect the cornea are Conjunctivitis (pink eye) and Corneal Infections.

The cornea is clear, however, it is a highly organized group of cells and proteins. It contains no blood vessels which makes it an unusual tissue in the body. Since blood vessels usually provide nourishment to most body tissues, the cornea's lack of blood vessels means it receives nourishment from fluids in front of it and behind it. These fluid layers are the tear film in front and the aqueous humor in back. To refract light properly, all the layers of the cornea need to remain clear, or free from any cloudy or opaque areas, because even the tiniest of blood vessels, or smallest of scars can interfere with sight.

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One common problem that sometimes affects the cornea is Conjunctivitis, more commonly known as Pink Eye. This is a group of diseases that can cause redness, swelling, burning, and itching. These symptoms can be caused by a bacterial or viral infection, allergy, environmental irritants, contact lens products, eye drops or even eye ointments. Conjunctivitis caused by a virus is most common, and it spreads easily from person to person and can spread to a large number of people in a short period of time. In some cases, viral conjunctivitis can cause scarring on the clear cornea. When this occurs, eye drops are needed to reduce the chance of permanent scarring. In some cases, permanent vision loss can occur despite treatment. This means the best treatment is prevention. You can prevent viral conjunctivitis, like any type of infection, by avoiding direct contact with people who have it, and by washing hands frequently and avoiding touching the face and eyes. Not every case of conjunctivitis will need treatment, however an eye doctor should be consulted at the onset of the symptoms.

Other common problems that can affect the cornea are Corneal Infections. These types of infections are more common in people who wear contact lenses. You can reduce the chance of developing serious corneal infections by paying attention to cleaning the lenses properly and not wearing them to sleep. Other types of infections such as the Herpes Simplex virus are always in our environment, and sometimes can find their way to the cornea to create an infection. Symptoms include pain in the eye, redness, sensitivity to light and blurry vision. In a small number of cases, these infections can permanently scar the cornea, which will impair vision and could require a corneal transplant. For people who wear contact lenses, it is important to note that corneal infection, even though not frequent, are a serious problem that should be evaluated and treated by an eye doctor, immediately at onset of symptoms. Eye drops can be helpful in treating corneal infections, but as with many conditions, the earlier the treatment is initiated, the better chance of success in treating the problem without long term consequences.

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It is important to remember to not touch eyes with dirty hands, to keep contacts clean and wear them according to instructions, and wear protective eye wear when engaging in sports or using power tools in order to prevent accidents, infections or other problems that could affect the vision.

Dr. Tortora, a board certified ophthalmologist, is host of “The Hawaiian Eye Show,” a weekly informational radio program about healthy vision. He and his colleagues at Hawaiian Eye Center are committed to educating the public about the importance of preventative eye care. To learn more about a variety of eye health issues, please call the Hawaiian Eye Center at 621-8488 where “*life has never looked better.*”

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