

# Corneal infection

## Act fast to prevent blindness!

Patients with painful red eyes often present to pharmacy staff and community health workers. If there is also a white spot on their cornea, they may have a corneal infection. If you act fast, you can prevent blindness and loss of the eye.

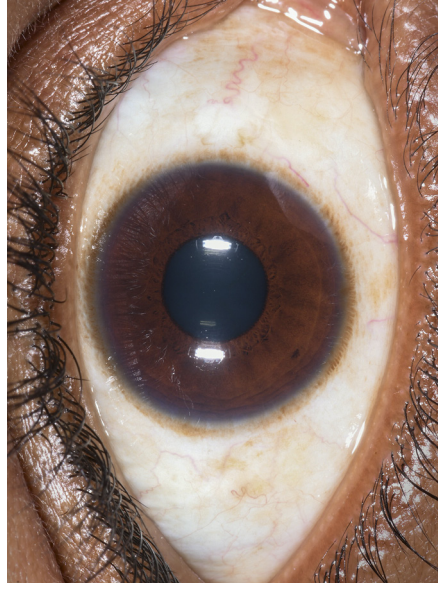
### How to examine the eye

Look at the eye up close with a bright light and magnification (for example, a phone camera). Ask the patient to look up and down, and right and left.

**If the eye is so painful that the patient cannot open their eye to be examined, refer them to an eye clinic or eye specialist immediately.**

### What is the cornea?

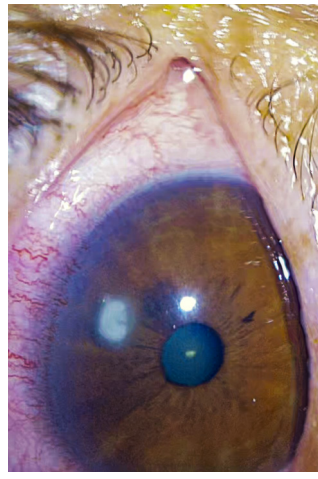
In a healthy eye, the cornea is the clear/see-through area in front of the pupil (black) and iris (brown).



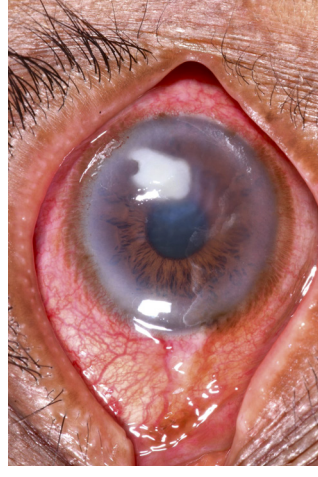
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### How to recognise a corneal infection

Any white patch on the cornea, with redness and pain, suggests an infection.



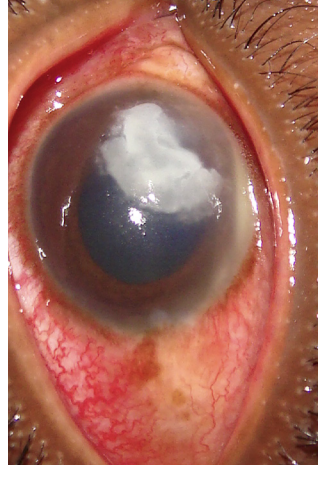
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**Early-stage infection.** Note the white patch on the cornea (see arrow) and the redness elsewhere.

**Late-stage infection,** with a larger white patch and a collection of pus at the base of the cornea.

## What to do

If the patient has a white patch, redness, and pain:



**Urgently** refer the patient to an eye specialist. They must be seen **within 24 hours**. Give them the address and directions to get there.



Start the patient on **broad-spectrum antibiotic eye drops**, which they must apply every 1 or 2 hours until they see the eye specialist.



Explain to the patient how to instill the eye drops, without touching the eye.



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## What to avoid

If the patient has a white patch, redness, and pain they must *not* use:

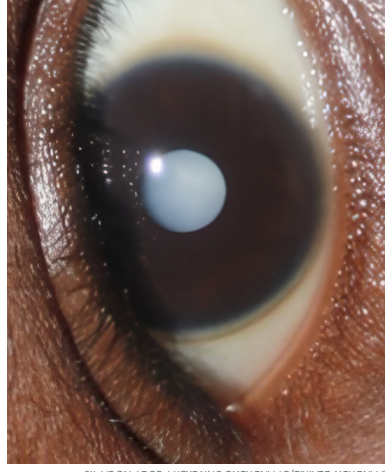


Steroid eye drops, such as prednisolone or dexamethasone

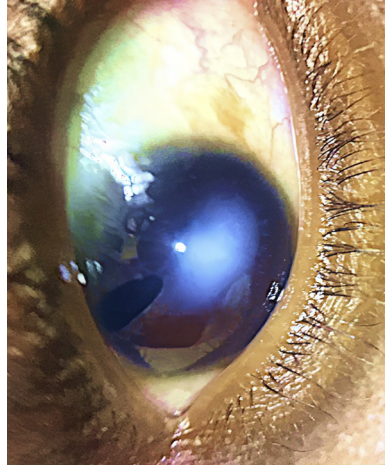


Non-sterile preparations

**These will make the infection worse.**



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If you can see a white area but there is no redness or pain, this is probably not an infection. The patient may have **cataract** (left) or a **corneal scar** (right). Refer them to an eye specialist for advice.

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