

Eye Socket Infection (Orbital Cellulitis)

What is orbital cellulitis?

Orbital cellulitis is a severe infection inside your eye socket, which is called the orbit.

Orbital cellulitis is an emergency. It can cause permanent blindness if not treated right away.

What is the cause?

Eye socket infections can start after a surgery or an injury to the eye. Sinus or dental infections, or skin infections around your eye and eyelids can spread to your eye socket through the thin bones and veins near your eye. Also, an infection that starts somewhere else in your body can spread through the bloodstream to your eye.

Eye socket infections are usually caused by bacteria. Fungus may cause this infection if you have if your immune system is weakened by diabetes, HIV, chemotherapy, or other conditions. Fungus is a kind of germ. It includes things like yeast, mold, and mildew.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may include:

- Decreased vision or double vision
- Pain, swelling, and redness in and around your eye
- Watery, yellow, or green discharge from your eye
- Fever
- Problems moving your eye in one or more directions
- One eye looks like it bulges forward compared to the other eye

You may have a runny nose or a stuffy nose with these symptoms.

How is it diagnosed?

Your eye care provider will ask about your symptoms and medical history and do exams and tests such as:

- An exam using a microscope with a light attached, called a slit lamp, to look closely at the front and back of your eye
- An exam using drops to enlarge, or dilate, your pupils and a light to look into the back of your eyes
- CT scan, which uses x-rays and a computer to show detailed pictures of your eye socket
- MRI, which uses a strong magnetic field and radio waves to show detailed pictures the bones and tissues of your eye socket and sinuses

- Lab tests of the discharge from your eye
- Blood tests to check for signs of infection and bacteria in the blood

How is it treated?

If the infection is found and treated quickly, you may have no loss of vision. You may need to stay in the hospital and receive medicines to treat the infection through an IV. You may need surgery to drain the infection.

How can I take care of myself?

Follow the full course of treatment your healthcare provider prescribes. Ask your healthcare provider:

- How and when you will hear your test results
- How long it will take to recover
- What activities you should avoid and when you can return to your normal activities
- How to take care of yourself at home
- What symptoms or problems you should watch for and what to do if you have them

Make sure you know when you should come back for a checkup.

How can I prevent an eye socket infection?

If you think you have an infection of the skin around your eye or of your eyelids, contact your healthcare provider. If you have a history of sinus infections and develop eye symptoms, you should also seek medical attention.

Reviewed for medical accuracy by faculty at the Wilmer Eye Institute at Johns Hopkins. Web site: <http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/wilmer/>

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