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EYE ASSESSMENT - ADULT

Nurses with RN First Call Certified Practice designation (RN(C)s)¹ are able to manage the following eye conditions:

- Conjunctivitis
- Minor corneal abrasion

The following assessment must be completed and documented.

ASSESSMENT

History of Present Illness and Review of System

General

The following characteristics of each symptom should be elicited and explored:

- Onset (sudden or gradual)
- Chronology
- Current situation (improving or deteriorating)
- Location
- Radiation
- Quality
- Timing (frequency, duration)
- Severity
- Precipitating and aggravating factors
- Relieving factors
- Associated symptoms
- Effects on daily activities
- Previous diagnosis of similar episodes
- Previous treatments
- Efficacy of previous treatments

Cardinal Signs and Symptoms

In addition to the general characteristics outlined above, additional characteristics of specific symptoms should be elicited, as follows:

¹ RN(C) is an [authorized title](#) recommended by CRNBC that refers to CRNBC-certified RNs, and is used throughout this Decision Support Tool (DST).

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The DSTs are not intended to replace the RN(C)'s professional responsibility to exercise independent clinical judgment and use evidence to support competent, ethical care. The RN(C) must consult with or refer to a physician or nurse practitioner as appropriate, or whenever a course of action deviates from the DST.

Vision

- Recent changes
- Blurring
- Halos
- Floaters

Other Associated Symptoms

- Pain
- Headache
- Irritation
- Foreign-body sensation
- Photophobia
- Diplopia
- Lacrimation
- Itching
- Discharge
- Ear pain
- Nasal discharge
- Sore throat
- Cough
- Nausea or vomiting
- Urethral, vaginal or rectal discharge
- Pain or inflammation of the joints

Medical History (General)

- Medical conditions and surgeries
- Allergies (seasonal as well as medication)
- Medication currently used (prescription, oral contraceptives, over the counter)
- Herbal preparations and traditional therapies
- Communicable diseases: herpes simplex / zoster

Medical History (Specific to eyes)

- Eye diseases, defects, or injuries
- Eye surgery, including corrective
- Use of eyeglasses or contact lenses, corrective or cosmetic
- Change in type of contact lens or solution
- Concurrent infection of the upper respiratory tract
- Other infectious diseases (chicken pox, measles)
- Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)
- Immunocompromise
- Exposure to eye irritants (environmental or occupational)
- Current eye medications - homatropine, cyclogyl, steroids
- Systemic inflammatory disease (Inflammatory Bowel Disease, Reiter's syndrome, Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA), Lupus)
- Diabetes mellitus
- Hypertension

- Chronic renal disease
- Bleeding disorders

Family History

- Visual disorders (i.e. glaucoma, blindness, etc.)
- Systemic inflammatory disease (i.e., arthritis conditions, lupus)
- Diabetes mellitus
- Others with eye infections

Personal and Social History (Specific to eyes)

- Occupational exposure to irritants
- Use of protective eyewear
- Housing and sanitation conditions
- Exposure to contagious organisms (e.g. conjunctivitis)
- Sexual activity

PHYSICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE EYES

Vitals

- Temperature
- Pulse
- Respiration
- SpO₂
- Blood pressure (BP)

General

- Apparent state of health
- Appearance of comfort or distress
- Colour
- Nutritional status
- State of hydration
- Hygiene
- Match between appearance and stated age

Inspection

Test visual acuity, visual field

Inspection

- Bony Orbit: edema, lesions, bruising
- Lids and Lashes: ability to open and close, edema, erythema, crusting, eyelash position, tremors, foreign bodies, lesions. Evert upper lids as required.
- Lacrimal Apparatus: tearing, size
- Conjunctiva and Sclera: color, pattern of injection, discharge, edema, haemorrhage, pterygium, foreign body
- Cornea: clarity, abrasions or lacerations, arcus senilis (lipid deposition around cornea), foreign body. Fluorescein stain for corneal integrity.
- Pupil and Iris: color, size, shape, reactivity to light and accommodation
- Lens: transparency, opacities

- Fundi: red reflex, haemorrhage, optic disc, retinal vasculature
- Extraocular muscles: Extra ocular eye movements (EOEM), position and alignment of eyes (i.e., strabismus): use corneal light reflex test, cover-uncover test

Palpation

Palpate the bony orbit, eyebrows, eyelids, lacrimal apparatus and pre-auricular lymph nodes for tenderness, swelling or masses.

Do not palpate globe if rupture injury is suspected or if the client has undergone recent eye surgery

Associated Systems

- An ENT examination, including the lymph nodes of the head and neck, should also be performed if there are symptoms of a systemic condition, such as viral URTI or an STI, (e.g. gonorrhea) is suspected
- Pre-auricular adenopathy might indicate chlamydial, viral or invasive bacterial infection of the eye (e.g., gonorrhea)

Abdomen

Assess liver for tenderness and enlargement if eye symptoms are associated with symptoms of an STI.

Genitourinary System and Rectal Area

Assess for urethral, cervical or vaginal discharge if eye symptoms are associated with symptoms of an STI.

Musculoskeletal System and Extremities

Examine the joints to assess for warmth, redness, pain or swelling.

SYMPTOMS REQUIRING URGENT REFERRAL

The first step is to differentiate major or serious causes of red eye from minor causes. The following signs and symptoms require urgent referral to a physician or nurse practitioner:

- Unilateral or bilateral eye pain
- Ocular pain
- Ocular injury of any kind
- Severe photophobia of unknown cause
- Persistent blurring of vision
- Recent onset of visual disturbances – light flashes, floaters (recent onset), halos, dimming, visual distortion, double vision, abnormal colour perception or loss of visual acuity.
- Visual field loss
- Reduced ocular movement
- Exophthalmos (proptosis)
- Ciliary flush
- Hyphema
- Irregular cornea (epithelial defect or opacity, irregular corneal reflection of light)
- Non-reactive pupil
- Treatment failure after 3 days
- Worsening symptoms
- Compromised host (e.g., immuno-suppressed client)
- Signs of preseptal or orbital cellulitis
- Symptoms in conjunction with a communicable disease i.e. chickenpox
- Finger like (dendritic) projections noted on fluorescein stain (herpetic)

DIAGNOSTIC TESTS

The RN(C) may consider the following diagnostic tests in the examination of the eye to support clinical decision-making:

- Swab drainage for Culture and Sensitivity (C&S) only if there is no resolution of symptoms after an empiric course of treatment.

ADDITIONAL TESTING

Apply fluorescein stain to test for corneal integrity if there is a possibility that a corneal abrasion has occurred.

REFERENCES

More recent editions of any of the items in the Reference List may have been published since this DST was published. If you have a newer version, please use it.

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