

KERATOCONUS

Keratoconus literally means “cone-shaped cornea.” The cornea is an important part of your eye. The cornea focuses light as it enters the eye. With keratoconus, the shape of the cornea is distorted, causing vision to blur. Keratoconus can make some activities difficult, such as driving, typing on a computer, watching television or reading.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF KERATOCONUS?

Keratoconus usually affects both eyes, though symptoms in each eye may differ. Symptoms usually start to occur in people who are in their late teens and early 20s and may include:

- mild blurring of vision;
- slight distortion of vision;
- increased sensitivity to light;
- glare;
- mild eye irritation.

The rate of progression varies. Keratoconus will often progress slowly for 10 to 20 years and then suddenly stop. As the condition progresses, the most common symptoms include:

- increased blurring and distortion of vision;
- increased nearsightedness or astigmatism;
- frequent eyeglass prescription changes;
- difficulty wearing contact lenses.

Occasionally, keratoconus can advance rapidly, causing the cornea to become scarred. Scar tissue on the cornea causes it to lose clarity. As a result, even more distortion and blurring of vision can occur.

WHAT CAUSES KERATOCONUS?

The cause of keratoconus is still not known. Some researchers believe that genetics play a role, since an estimated 10 percent of people with keratoconus also have a family member with the condition.

HOW IS KERATOCONUS TREATED?

Treatment often depends on the severity of the condition. During the early stages, vision can be corrected with eyeglasses. As the condition progresses, rigid contacts may need to be worn to maintain adequate vision. You should also refrain from rubbing your eyes, as this can make symptoms worse.

A relatively new way to treat keratoconus is with Collagen Cross-Linking. A special UV light along with eye drops is used to strengthen the cornea. This helps to flatten or stiffen the cornea to keep it from bulging further.

When good vision is no longer possible with contact lenses, a corneal transplant may be recommended. This surgery is only necessary in about 10 percent to 20 percent of patients with keratoconus. In a corneal transplant, the diseased cornea is removed from your eye and replaced with a healthy donor cornea. While a corneal transplant will relieve the symptoms of keratoconus, it may not provide flawless vision. However, of all conditions requiring corneal transplants, keratoconus has the best prognosis for clear vision.