

the (eye) doctor can see you now

When a member of the family is faced with an eye infection or injury, your first call should be your Doctor of Optometry.



When eight-year-old Matthew woke up with a red, painful eye one Saturday morning, it didn't occur to his mom, Heather Coffin of Vancouver, B.C., to take him to a Doctor of Optometry. A few days after starting antibiotic drops, it looked like Matthew's symptoms were improving, but he still complained that his eye felt scratchy and sore. "To me, it seemed like his eye was getting better," says Coffin. However, Matthew said it wasn't.

A few days later, during an already-booked visit to the optometrist to have his glasses fixed, Matthew insisted his mom mention his sore eye to the doctor.

Sure enough, Doctor of Optometry Tony Wong could see with a microscope a tiny fleck of what appeared to be rust-tinged metal.

After numbing Matthew's eye with some drops, Dr. Wong was able to gently remove the offending particle with a saline-moistened cotton swab.

The discovery was made in the nick of time. A few more days and the rust could have reacted with the cornea of the eye to cause more inflammation, and perhaps even permanent scarring. "If something like this happened again, I would definitely call Dr. Wong first," says Coffin.

Susan Johnson's 13-year-old daughter Kristin* might have suffered vision loss in her eye, too, had it not been for a regular eye exam. A few days before Kristin's appointment with the family's optometrist, the teen woke up with a pink, irritated-looking left eye. Having seen her two kids through several bouts

*Names changed upon request

of pink eye (an infection also known as conjunctivitis), Johnson, a mother of two in Victoria, B.C., assumed that was the culprit.

"How many times have we gotten pink eye over the years?" Johnson says. "I thought, you just get antibiotic drops to treat the infection and away you go, right?" Kristin's symptoms improved. But a few days later, on the morning of Kristin's scheduled eye exam with the optometrist, Johnson suspected something was still wrong. "Kristin said, 'Mom, I can't really see out of that eye; it's blurry.'"

When Dr. Gurpreet Leekha, the Johnson family's Doctor of Optometry, examined Kristin's eye using an upright microscope equipped with a high intensity light called a slit-lamp, he was quickly able to identify the problem. It was not pink eye, but a severe form of iritis that causes an inflammation of the middle layer of the eye, and can lead to vision loss. (Iritis can happen out of the blue, but more than one bout can signal an underlying health problem, like juvenile rheumatoid arthritis.)

"Because we have specialized equipment available, we can zoom right in on the problem, see which layer is involved, and figure out which tissues are infected or inflamed," Dr. Leekha says.

Not only was the care Kristin received specialized, it was quick. "I hadn't even been home from his office for an hour before our optometrist called in the prescriptions to our pharmacy so I could pick everything up and start treatment immediately," says Johnson. Dr. Leekha also made a referral to an ophthalmologist (a medical doctor who specializes in diagnosing and treating more complex eye problems, often surgically) who agreed to see Kristin for an evaluation that same week.

Although Kristin needed more aggressive treatment, she ultimately regained 20/20 vision in her left eye. "I'm very thankful," says Johnson.

“Because we have specialized equipment available, we can zoom right in on the problem, see which layer is involved, and figure out which tissues are infected or inflamed.”

– Dr. Gurpreet Leekha

Visit DoctorsOfOptometry.ca for details, and to find an optometrist near you.

SEE HERE



Many Canadians don't think to call the optometrist's office when faced with an eye infection or injury. A 2014 survey of 2,000 Canadians, conducted by Mustel Research, found that 49 per cent of respondents would seek treatment from their family doctor for itchy or red eyes, and more than 50 per cent would visit a family doctor or ER for a foreign body stuck in the eye. Less than 20 per cent knew they could turn to their optometrist first.

"Many people simply don't realize that optometrists have the specialized training and equipment to treat a range of acute eye conditions, or that most can see patients the same day if the matter is deemed urgent," says Doctor of Optometry Tony Wong.

"The majority of Canadians end up at their local emergency department every year with eye conditions that could be quickly and effectively treated by their optometrist."

A trip to the optometrist doesn't require a referral. In most provinces, many urgent eye conditions are covered by the provincial health insurance plan. (Coverage varies depending on where you live - check with your Doctor of Optometry for more details.)



DOCTORS OF
OPTOMETRY
CANADA™