

Lattice Dystrophy*

In some people, these abnormal protein fibers can accumulate under the cornea's outer layer--the epithelium. This can cause erosion of the epithelium. This condition is known as recurrent epithelial erosion. These erosions: (1) alter the cornea's normal curvature, resulting in temporary vision problems; and (2) expose the nerves that line the cornea, causing severe pain. Even the involuntary act of blinking can be painful.

To ease this pain, a doctor may prescribe eye drops and ointments to reduce the friction on the eroded cornea. In some cases, an eye patch may be used to immobilize the eyelids. With effective care, these erosions usually heal within three days, although occasional sensations of pain may occur for the next six to eight weeks.

By about age 40, some people with lattice dystrophy will have scarring under the epithelium, resulting in a haze on the cornea that can greatly obscure vision. In this case, a corneal transplant may be needed. Although people with lattice dystrophy have an excellent chance for a successful transplant, the disease may also arise in the donor cornea in as little as three years. In one study, about half of the transplant patients with lattice dystrophy had a recurrence of the disease from between two to 26 years after the operation. Of these, 15 percent required a second corneal transplant. Early lattice and recurrent lattice arising in the donor cornea responds well to treatment with the excimer laser.

Although lattice dystrophy can occur at any time in life, the condition usually arises in children between the ages of two and seven.

*Courtesy of the National Eye Institute

<http://www.nei.nih.gov/health/cornealdisease/#13>