

Better Safe Than Sorry

By Dr. Mahipal Sachdev

Diwali and fire crackers have almost become synonymous. Fire crackers provide such a visual delight and could indeed be appreciated from the aesthetic point of view. Crackers add brightness & joy to our celebrations.

However, one cannot ignore the fact that fire crackers, if not handled with care and caution, could pose a serious health hazard to many who come in contact with them. That is why, every year a number of people across the country, lose their eyesight and sustain burns during the festival. They could bring about untold miseries to revelers and ruin their Diwali celebrations. Hence, the key is adopting a safety approach. That would go a long way in ensuring that you have a happy and safe Diwali.

After an eye injury one may have complaints like diminishing vision, redness, watering and inability to open the eye. The injury may present with a lid tear, tear in conjunctiva, sclera-corneal tear with protrusion of eye contents or blood in the eye.

Ocular trauma because of crackers can present in different forms like,

1. Foreign body entry in the eye
2. Burns on face
3. Blunt Injury
4. Perforating Injury

These in any form may lead to traumatic cataract, retinal edema, retinal detachment, infection or total disfigurement of the eye.

We have seen children losing their eye sight because of the eye-injuries during these festivals despite full treatment being instituted in time. Not only vision but many times the eye ball is disfigured and in spite of treatment the child has a sunken eyeball which is cosmetically disturbing.

Care one should take once the injury has occurred is:

- Wear protective goggles while lighting fireworks to prevent eye injuries
- Immediately flush the eye with water. Hold the eye under a basin or shower, or pour water into the eye using a clean container. Keep the eye open and as wide as possible while flushing. Continue flushing for at least 15 minutes
- If a contact lens is in the eye, begin flushing over the lens immediately. This may wash away the lens
- Avoid playing crackers alone and should be a group activity
- Rush to eye specialist as early as possible if any injury is present. One should consult even if any redness and watering is present.
- Hold lighted sparklers away from the body
- Use a candle or an agarbathi to ignite fireworks. They burn without an open flame and provide a greater and safer distance between your hands and the fireworks

Few don'ts one should be aware of are:

- Do not disturb the injured area/do not rub the eye
- No eye washing if cuts present

- Do not try to remove an object in the eye
- Don't put any eye bandage if sterile pad is not available
- Don't use any eye ointment
- Avoid synthetic clothes and use cotton clothes
- Avoid burning crackers in tin/ glass
- Never give fireworks to small children
- Never ignite aerial fireworks where overhead obstruction (trees, wires, etc.) may interfere with trajectory into open air space.
- Never re-light a firework which has not burnt properly. Wait for 15 to 20 minutes and then soak it in a bucket of water
- Never throw or point fireworks at other people
- Never ignite fireworks while holding them. Put them down, then ignite them and walk away

Few do's and don'ts can prevent loss of eyesight and other mishaps during the ensuing Diwali festival. Injuries in any form don't assume it harmless. Even a small injury may be vision threatening. Basic knowledge about primary care will make the treatment easier and faster.

ENJOY YOUR CRACKERS WITH A LITTLE BIT CARE AND LOT OF CAUTION.

The Writer is Chairman and Medical Director, Centre for Sight, New Delhi. E-mail: drmahipal@gmail.com