

Eye Drops

Sections

Eye Medication Mix-Ups

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Have you ever confused your eyedrop medications with some other medicine in a similar dropper bottle? If so, know that you are not alone. Unfortunately, these mix-ups when trying to put in eye drops are common.

Six Tips To Avoid Eye Drop Mix-Ups

1. **Keep them apart.** Do not store eye drops with any other drop bottles (like ear drops, superglue, or your pet's medication drops).
2. **Keep them in their boxes.** Leave your eye drops and ear drops in their original boxes. There are often pictures of an ear or eye on the boxes, but not on the bottles.
3. **Know your eyedrop names and cap colors.** Learn the name and cap color of your medications so you take them correctly. If you can't see your eyedrop bottles clearly enough to tell them apart, tell your doctor.
4. **Check your medicine—out loud.** Read the dropper label out loud to help avoid mistakes.
5. **Take eye and ear drops at different times.** This can help reduce the risk of mixing them up as you put them in your eyes/ears.
6. **Throw away leftover drops.** Get rid of any leftover drops once you are through using them. The fewer the bottles, the fewer to get mixed up.



Dropper bottles often look the same, though they contain very different substances. Be careful when reaching for your eye drops that you aren't mixing them up with something else. Photo: Thomas L. Steinemann, MD.

Eye Drop Mistakes Are Common

Putting ear drops into eyes is one of the more common mishaps. Eyedrop and eardrop medicine bottles look very similar. Both use a dropper with a rubber bulb at the top. Even the medical terms for eyes (optic) and ears (otic) are only one letter off, making it difficult to see the difference on the packaging and labeling.

Accidentally putting ear drops into your eyes can lead to red, burning, stinging eyes, as well as swelling and blurry vision. Generally, these symptoms are short-lived. However, there are some substances mistakenly put into eyes that could have led to very serious injuries.

One man confused a small bottle of fingernail glue for the eye drops he had been prescribed after eye surgery. The bottles were nearly identical in size and shape, as well as how they were opened. The man put the super-strong, fast-acting glue for false fingernails into his eye. As soon as he realized his mistake, he washed his eye out with water. However, he arrived at the hospital with his eyelids glued together. Doctors used a slit lamp to magnify the eye and very fine instruments to remove the glue. Fortunately, this man ended up with a small corneal abrasion and a red eye, but his vision was saved. Unfortunately, this man was not the only person to mistake glue for eye drops due to the similar product packaging. Reports of sticky mix-ups like this one are numerous.

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