

When the Skin Heals,

But the Eyes Don't

Understanding the Hidden Ocular Impact of Stevens–Johnson Syndrome

Most people believe recovery ends when the skin heals.

For many patients, that is only the beginning of protecting their vision.

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10 – MINUTE READ

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The skin heals because we can see it. The eyes often continue to suffer quietly.

– Dr Geetha Iyer



Usually begins 1–3 weeks after starting a new medication



Eye damage can begin during the acute illness



Early eye care may reduce long-term complications



Recovery continues long after the skin heals

A NOTE FROM

DR GEETHA IYER

When I first began caring for patients with Stevens–Johnson Syndrome, I realised something that changed the way I look at this disease forever.

The greatest challenge wasn't simply saving vision. It was helping patients understand that recovery didn't end when they left the hospital.

Many returned months later believing nothing more could be done. Some had accepted chronic pain. Others believed losing vision was inevitable.

Neither is always true.

This article is my attempt to explain, in simple language, what happens to the eyes after Stevens–Johnson Syndrome, why early care matters so much, and why there is still reason to hope— even if your journey has already begun.

Geetha Iyer

Dr Geetha Iyer

Medical Director, CODE Eye Care

“

Doctor... everyone says I've recovered. Then why do my eyes still burn?

That single question has stayed with me over the years.

It usually comes weeks—or sometimes months—after a patient has survived one of the most frightening illnesses they will ever experience.

The fever is gone. The skin has healed. Family members are relieved. Life slowly returns to normal. And yet, every morning, the eyes tell a different story.



Sensitive to light



Watery or gritty sensation



Blurry or fluctuating vision



Difficulty reading



Burning or pain

Many patients assume this is simply part of recovery. Unfortunately, it often isn't.

While Stevens–Johnson Syndrome is widely recognised as a severe disease affecting the skin, it can also permanently affect one of the most delicate structures in the body—the surface of the eye.

The good news is that many of these complications can be reduced, and sometimes prevented, if they are recognised and treated early.

This article explains why the eyes remain vulnerable long after the skin heals, what symptoms should never be ignored, and how modern ocular surface care can help protect vision and improve quality of life.



With the right care, many patients can regain comfort and protect their vision.

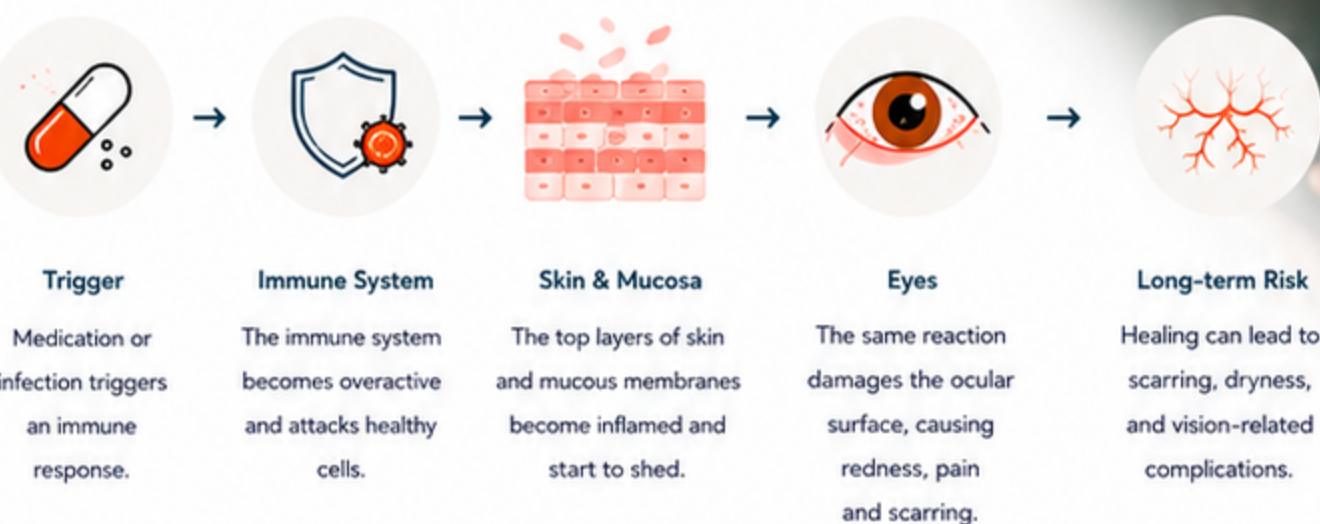
Pictured: Patient reading with discomfort.

What Exactly is Stevens–Johnson Syndrome?

Stevens–Johnson Syndrome (SJS) is a rare but serious reaction, most often triggered by medications or infections. The body’s immune system attacks the skin and mucous membranes.

It can also affect the ocular surface—the clear, protective layer over the white of the eye and the inner eyelids.

THE IMMUNE REACTION (SIMPLIFIED)



“Understanding what happens is the first step towards protecting your vision.”
– Dr Geetha Iyer



SJS is a medical emergency.
Early recognition and immediate treatment are critical to saving lives and reducing long-term complications.



The eyes can be affected even if eye symptoms appear later.

THE PATIENT EXPERIENCE

Light Sensitivity

Bright light can become painful or uncomfortable.

Watery or Gritty Eyes

Eyes may water constantly or feel like something is stuck in them.

Blurred Vision

Vision can fluctuate throughout the day and may gradually worsen.

Burning or Discomfort

A persistent burning sensation that does not go away.

Difficulty Reading

Sustained reading or screen time becomes challenging.

“SJS is not just a skin disease. It is an immune reaction that can silently damage the eyes and affect quality of life for years to come.”
– Dr Geetha Iyer



With the right care, many patients can regain comfort and protect their vision.

How the Eyes Are Affected in SJS

During Stevens–Johnson Syndrome, the same immune reaction that damages the skin can inflame and injure the tissues that protect the eye.

The ocular surface is delicate. Even a small amount of inflammation can lead to long-term problems if not treated early.

WHAT CAN HAPPEN?



Surface Inflammation

The conjunctiva and cornea become inflamed and painful.



Tear Film Instability

The tear film becomes unstable, leading to dryness and irritation.



Corneal Damage

The corneal surface can develop spots, ulcers or thinning.



Symblepharon

Scar tissue can form between the eyelid and eyeball.



Limbal Stem Cell Deficiency

Damage to limbal stem cells can affect long-term healing.



The eyes may look normal in the early stages.

Damage can be happening even before symptoms become obvious.



Early assessment can make a significant difference.

Timely care may reduce the risk of permanent complications.

REAL PATIENT STORY

“ I thought I had recovered. But my eyes had other plans. Bright lights hurt. Reading became difficult. I didn’t know why—until I met Dr Geetha.

Anita, a 28-year-old teacher, underwent treatment for SJS triggered by medication. Her skin healed well, but weeks later she noticed redness, dryness and difficulty reading.

An early ocular surface evaluation revealed inflammation and tear film instability.

With the right treatment and regular follow-up, Anita’s comfort improved, and her vision stabilised.



Every patient’s journey is different. Early care can change the outcome.

THE OCULAR SURFACE: A DELICATE SYSTEM



THE TEAR FILM (PROTECTIVE LAYERS)

Mucus Layer

Helps tears spread evenly across the eye.

Aqueous Layer

Provides moisture and nutrients.

Lipid Layer

Reduces evaporation and keeps tears stable.

In SJS, inflammation and scarring can disrupt these layers, leading to dryness, irritation, and long-term damage.

Restoring the ocular surface is key to restoring comfort and protecting vision.

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Frequently Asked Questions

The Acute Phase: Act Fast, Protect the Eyes

The eyes can be affected even before skin symptoms appear. Early ophthalmic involvement and treatment can significantly reduce the risk of long-term damage.

EARLY CARE FOCUS



Frequent Eye Examinations
Daily assessments during the acute phase are essential.



Aggressive Lubrication
Preservative-free lubricants help protect the ocular surface.



Control Inflammation
Topical steroids and immunomodulators may be used as advised.



Prevent Adhesions
Early measures can prevent scarring of the eyelid and surface.



Multidisciplinary Care
Dermatologists and ophthalmologists working together improve outcomes.

“
The decisions we make in the first few days can change the course of your eye health for years to come.
– Dr Geetha Iyer



Timely care in the acute phase can prevent permanent damage and improve long-term outcomes.



Don't wait for symptoms to worsen. Early action can protect your vision.

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WHAT HAPPENS IN THE ACUTE PHASE?

The immune reaction causes widespread inflammation of the ocular surface. Without early treatment, this can lead to scarring, dryness, and vision-threatening complications.

POSSIBLE EARLY SIGNS

- Redness and irritation
- Pain or burning sensation
- Excessive watering
- Sensitivity to light
- Blurred or fluctuating vision
- Difficulty opening the eyes



If you notice any of these signs, seek eye care immediately. Early intervention can make all the difference.

THE GOAL OF EARLY TREATMENT



Reduce Inflammation

Calm the immune response to minimise damage to the ocular surface.



Protect the Ocular Surface

Maintain a healthy tear film and prevent dryness and breakdown.



Prevent Scarring and Adhesions

Early steps help prevent eyelid and surface adhesions that can affect vision.



Preserve Vision

Acting early offers the best chance of a good long-term outcome.



QUICK TIP

Keep a list of your medications and show it to your eye doctor.

Some medicines can trigger or worsen SJS.

Never start or stop any medication without medical advice.



You are not alone. With early care, close monitoring, and the right support, we can protect your eyes and preserve your vision.



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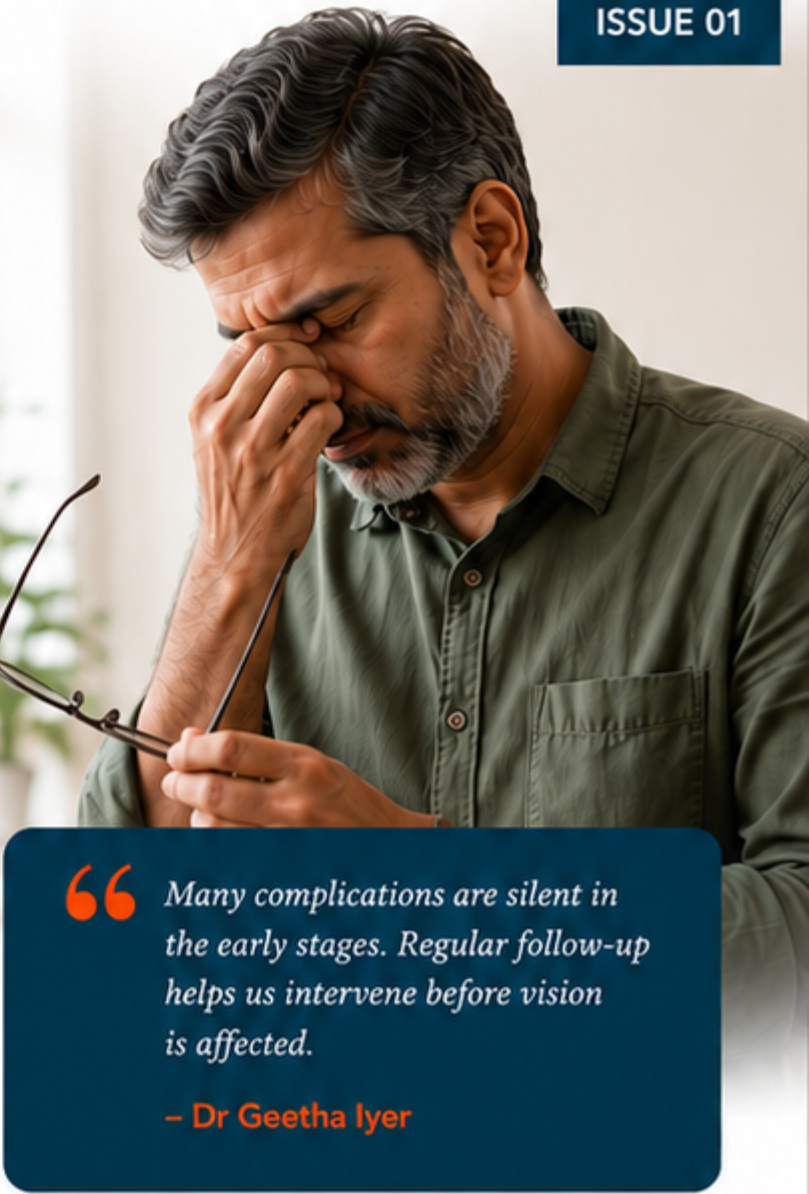
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Long-term Effects: Why Ongoing Care Matters

Even after the skin has healed, the eyes can continue to face challenges. Scarring and inflammation can lead to chronic problems that affect comfort and vision.

POTENTIAL LONG-TERM COMPLICATIONS

					
Chronic Dry Eye Persistent dryness, irritation and foreign body sensation.	Symblepharon Scar bands can adhere the eyelid to the eyeball.	Corneal Scarring Scarring can affect vision clarity and cause glare.	Limbal Stem Cell Deficiency Loss of stem cells can lead to surface instability.	Glaucoma Inflammation and steroid use can increase eye pressure.	Vision Loss In advanced cases, vision can be severely affected.



“ Many complications are silent in the early stages. Regular follow-up helps us intervene before vision is affected.

– Dr Geetha Iyer

 Complications can develop slowly. Regular follow-up is the key to staying ahead.

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WHY LONG-TERM FOLLOW-UP IS ESSENTIAL

-  Detect problems early before they become difficult to treat.
-  Adjust treatments to keep the eye surface healthy.
-  Monitor for side effects of medications.
-  Maintain comfort and protect vision over the long term.
-  SJS care doesn't stop when the skin heals. Your eyes need ongoing support.

REAL PATIENT STORY

“ I thought it was over after the hospital. But months later, my eyes were still dry, irritated and blurry. I'm glad I didn't give up on follow-up care.



Ramesh, 42, Bengaluru

Ramesh had SJS triggered by medication. His skin healed in 3 weeks, but he continued to experience dry eyes and glare.

Regular follow-up helped detect limbal stem cell deficiency early and his treatment was adjusted. Today, he works comfortably and sees well with the right support.

Ongoing care made all the difference.

YOUR EYES NEED ONGOING CARE



-  Attend all follow-up appointments.
-  Report new symptoms early.
-  Use medications as prescribed.
-  Protect your eyes from irritants and dryness.
-  Stay informed and stay proactive.

Together, we can protect your comfort and vision for the years ahead.

 You're not alone in this journey. With the right care and consistent follow-up, we can help you live well and protect your vision.

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Treatment & Management: A Personalised Approach

There is no one-size-fits-all treatment for SJS-related eye disease. Care is tailored to the stage of the disease and individual needs.

KEY PILLARS OF CARE



Medical Therapy
Lubricants, anti-inflammatories and immunomodulators reduce inflammation and protect.



Ocular Surface Protection
Protecting the surface helps reduce damage and improve comfort.



Surgical Interventions
Procedures to release scar tissue and restore function.



Advanced Therapies
Amniotic membrane transplants and stem cell therapies.



Visual Rehabilitation
Special lenses and optical aids to improve vision.



Lifelong Follow-up
Ongoing care adapts to changes over time.



Our goal is not just to treat the disease, but to help you see and live better.

TREATMENT IS INDIVIDUAL



Your treatment plan will depend on the severity of your eye involvement.



It may change over time as your eyes heal or if new challenges arise.



Regular assessments help us adjust and provide the best possible care.



Your involvement and feedback are vital to successful management.

OUR APPROACH



Comprehensive evaluation of your eyes



Clear explanation of options and expectations



Treatment tailored to your needs



Regular monitoring and proactive adjustments



Support for comfort, vision and quality of life





With the right strategy and consistent care, many patients can maintain comfort and useful vision. We are with you—every step of the way.



Rehabilitation & Recovery:

Rebuilding Comfort and Confidence

Recovery is a journey. With the right support, many patients can return to the activities and life they enjoy.

SUPPORTING YOUR RECOVERY



Visual Aids and Low Vision Support

Tools and training for daily activities.



Dry Eye Management

Advanced therapies to relieve chronic dryness.



Light Sensitivity

Manage environments, filters, tints and strategies for photophobia.



Emotional Well-being

Counselling and support groups can help.



Patient Education

Understanding your condition empowers you to care better.



Gradual Return to Activities

Step-by-step return to work, hobbies and life.

“Healing is more than treating the eyes. It is about helping you live fully again.”
– Dr Geetha Iyer



Healing takes time. Be kind to yourself.
Every small step forward matters.

TIPS FOR A SMOOTHER RECOVERY

- 

Follow your treatment plan consistently.
- 

Use lubricating drops as advised.
- 

Protect your eyes from wind, dust and bright light.
- 

Eat a balanced diet and stay hydrated.
- 

Get enough rest. Your eyes heal while you rest.
- 

Stay in touch with your eye care team and share any concerns.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE



Support from family, friends and healthcare professionals can make a big difference.

Reach out. Share how you feel.
It's okay to ask for help.



LOOKING AHEAD



Research and treatments are constantly evolving.

Hope, progress and the right care can lead to a brighter, more comfortable future.



Every day is an opportunity to heal, adapt and thrive.
We are here to support you—today, tomorrow and always.



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Frequently Asked Questions About SJS and Eye Care

Answers to common questions patients and families ask.



Q. Will my vision get worse over time?

A. It depends on the severity and how early the eyes are treated. Regular follow-up and proper care can greatly reduce the risk of long-term damage.



Q. How often should I have my eyes checked?

A. Follow-up frequency depends on your condition. Initially, visits may be more frequent, then spaced out as your eyes stabilise.



Q. Will I need to use eye drops forever?

A. Some patients need long-term treatment to keep the eye surface healthy. Your doctor will guide you based on your progress.



Q. Can SJS come back?

A. SJS itself does not come back, but the eye complications can worsen if care is stopped. Long-term management is important.



Q. Can I lead a normal life?

A. Yes. With the right care and support, many patients study, work, and enjoy life fully. You are not defined by your condition.



Q. Where can I find support?

A. Connect with patient support groups, counsellors and your healthcare team. Sharing experiences can bring comfort and strength.

KEY TAKEAWAYS



SJS can affect the eyes in serious ways, but early care makes a big difference.



Consistent treatment and follow-up protect vision and improve comfort.



Management is long-term and personalised to your needs.



You don't have to go through it alone. Support is available.



Hope, progress and the right care can help you look forward to a brighter tomorrow.

**Your eyes matter. Your journey matters.
We are here to walk it with you.**



NEED HELP OR HAVE QUESTIONS?

Talk to your eye care team. They are your partners in care and recovery.
Ask. Learn. Stay informed. Take charge of your eye health.



Together, we can protect your vision and improve your quality of life.



Every step you take towards your eye health is a step towards a better tomorrow.
Stay Positive. Stay Strong. We are with you.



Your Eyes Deserve Long-Term Care

Surviving Stevens–Johnson Syndrome is only the beginning of recovery.

With the right care, ongoing follow-up and a personalised treatment plan, many patients can protect their vision and enjoy a better quality of life.



You are not alone in this journey.
**We are here for you—today,
tomorrow and always.**

MEET YOUR SPECIALISTS



Dr. Geetha Iyer
Medical Director

- ✓ Cornea
- ✓ Ocular Surface Disease
- ✓ Dry Eye
- ✓ Ocular Surface Reconstruction
- ✓ Boston KPro
- ✓ MOOKP



Dr. Bhaskar Srinivasan
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- ✓ Cornea
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BOOK AN APPOINTMENT
Appointments can be scheduled
by phone, email or through
our website.



If you or someone you know has recovered from Stevens–Johnson Syndrome and continues to experience burning, dryness, redness, sensitivity to light or blurred vision,
**an expert ocular surface assessment may help identify treatable causes
and protect long-term vision.**

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