

Dry eye and inflammatory lid disease

Blepharitis, Meibomianitis, Meibomian Gland Disease, Ocular rosacea

The Eye Unit Patient Information

This leaflet is for patients who have been diagnosed with Dry eye disease, Blepharitis, Meibomianitis, Meibomian Gland Disease, Ocular rosacea. It answers some commonly asked questions and gives treatment advice.

What is dry eye disease?

The eyes are kept moist and healthy by a complex interaction between the eyelids, multiple layers of the tear film and the eye surface. Dry eye disease is due to insufficient or poor quality tears. It is commonly caused or worsened by inflammatory lid disease (blepharitis, meibomian gland dysfunction, meibomianitis and ocular rosacea).

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms can include:

- soreness, burning, itching, grittiness and blurred vision
- a feeling that there is something in the eye, or tiredness of the eyes
- thickened, red eyelids with flakes, scales or crusts at the base of the eyelashes

Can dry eye disease be cured?

Unfortunately there is no complete cure for this condition, but most patients are helped by lifestyle changes and eye drops. You are likely to need to take these measures indefinitely to control your symptoms.

Practical Advice

There are many lifestyle changes you may consider:

- **avoid air blowing onto your eyes.** e.g. hair dryers, car heaters, air conditioners or fans
- **add moisture to the air.** e.g. in centrally heated homes, consider a humidifier or place damp clean towels on hot radiators
- **consider wearing wraparound sunglasses or other protective eyewear.** Frequent eye drops are still required
- **take regular eye breaks during prolonged visual tasks.** e.g. reading, screen work, using smart phones, watching TV or films. Close your eyes for a few minutes or blink repeatedly and apply frequent eye drops
- **be aware of your environment.** Apply eye drops more frequently for example in hot climates, at high altitude, or on long haul flights.
- **position your computer screen below eye level.** This may reduce your eye opening and slow the evaporation of tears.

- **stop smoking and avoid smoke**
- **contact lenses.** Discuss with your optometrist, but many patients need to reduce wear time or avoid contact lens use
- **reduce or avoid eye make-up.** If used, ensure you thoroughly remove make-up and use a hot compress daily
- **drink plenty of water**
- **reduce intake of caffeinated products**
- **reduce intake of alcohol**
- **acupuncture.** Some people have seen their dry eye symptoms improve after acupuncture therapy. Further research is needed in this area

Artificial Tear Substitutes

For most people, occasional eye drops are sufficient. If you have significant dry eye disease, you will need eye drops even when your eyes feel fine. Important notes:

- **artificial tears are available without a prescription.** No single brand works best for everyone. You may need to try several different brands before you find one that works best for you
- **use artificial tears regularly** to reduce friction between the eyelids and eye surface and prevent on-going damage. In most cases drops 6 times a day are required. You may find preservative-free drops more comfortable, especially with frequent use
- **consider using lubricating ointment at night** as ointment is the most effective long-lasting lubricant. As it can blur the vision, it is only used in the daytime for severe symptoms. To help application, you can warm the ointment in your pocket or for 10 seconds in hot running water
- **lubricating eye drops can be kept in the fridge** as cool eye drops may be more soothing. Do not place eye ointments in the fridge as this will make application harder

Supportive Treatments

Inflammatory lid disease may cause more rapid tear evaporation. Frequent and gentle cleansing of the eyelid margin may help.

Lid margin cleaning

The openings of the eyelid glands can be cleansed and opened by scrubbing the eyelid margins. This is made easier by using medicated eye wipes or gels available in chemists and optometrists. Alternatively, tea tree oil preparations may be effective in some individuals. To prepare your own solution, boil half a mug of hot water, add 3 or 4 drops of tea tree oil and let it cool until it is lukewarm. Dip cotton wool balls into the solution, squeeze into small pad shapes and use these to scrub the eyelid margins.

Do not use solutions of no-tears formula (baby) shampoo or sodium bicarbonate solution.

Hot compresses:

Hot eyelid compresses help to clear the blocked glands and soften any crusty debris on the eyelid margin for easier removal. The eyelids need to be heated to at least 40°C for 10 minutes so that the oils in the glands of the eyelids can be physically expressed through their openings.

Microwaveable commercial 'Eye bags' are the most effective. To avoid injury, carefully follow the instructions for use. Immediately after heating, massage the upper and lower eyelids of both eyes in a vertical motion for at least one or two minutes using the soft pad of your index fingers. Finally, instill several drops of lubricating eye drops to flush away secretions and debris.

Supplements:

Although not scientifically proven, some patients have found dietary alterations helpful. These are also available as supplements from health food shops:

- **fatty acids.** Omega-3 fatty acids are in foods such as flaxseed, walnuts, salmon, sardines, trout and mackerel
- **vitamin A.** Found in liver, carrots and broccoli
- **flax seed oil**
- **lactoferrin supplements,** may reduce inflammation of the eye surface and the tear producing glands

Steroid or antibiotic ointments:

For severe flare-ups, Doctors may prescribe short term steroid or antibiotic ointments to apply on the eyelids or a course of antibiotic tablets.

Are there any complications from this condition?

As well as dry eye, some patients develop:

- **infections**
- **chalazions** - eyelid lumps due to swollen inflamed meibomian glands, see separate leaflet
- **corneal ulceration** - less common

Any problems or questions?

For further information and advice please contact:

Eye Emergency Helpline: 0300 019 4181

Mon-Sat: **8am-6pm** Sunday: **8:30am-2pm**. Bank Holidays: **8.30am-6pm**.

**The Eye Unit, The Royal Bournemouth Hospital,
Castle Lane East, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH7 7DW**

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t: 01202 303626 w: www.uhd.nhs.uk : @UHD_NHS : @UHTrust : @uhd_nhs