

Eye Unit

Dry Eyes

What is Dry Eye?

Dry eye syndrome occurs when there is a problem with the tear film which normally keeps the eye lubricated. This causes eye irritation.

Normally, salt water from the tear glands combines with thin layers of oil and mucus to form a stable lubricating film on the surface of the eyes. In some cases, not enough tears are produced, and the eyes become dry and sore. In other cases, the tear film does not spread properly across the eyes, or it may break down too quickly between blinks.

What are the causes?

- Ageing
- Medication
- Illness
- Environment – low humidity, windy conditions.
- Damage to the outer part of the eye from disease, surgery or injury
- Blepharitis (inflammation of the eyelids)

What are the symptoms?

Usually, both eyes are affected. They may not always **feel** dry. Symptoms include:

- Grittiness
- Burning



Patient Information

- Irritation
- Blurred vision
- Discomfort with bright light, tobacco smoke, contact lenses, hot dry weather and air conditioning.
- The eyes, and the eyelid margins, may look red.
- The blink rate may increase, or it may be hard to open the eyes or to keep them open.

What is the treatment?

Artificial tears – These come in the form of eye drops and give temporary relief. They thicken and stabilise the tear film, protecting the surface of the eye. They do not contain medication. They may have to be used very often during the day, and are suitable for long term use. There are many different kinds; it may be worth trying several kinds to find which works the best for you. They can be prescribed, or purchased direct from the chemist.

Lubricating eye ointments - These are much thicker than the drops, and last much longer between doses. However, they can blur your vision, so are recommended for use at bed-time.

Eye gels - These last longer than the drops, and are less blurring than ointment.

Note: some types of artificial tears contain preservatives such as benzalkonium hexachloride. Over a long period; they may damage the front of the eye (the cornea).

Therefore, if you use artificial tears more than four times per day, over a long period of time, it is best to use a preservative free brand which does not contain benzalkonium hexachloride.

Sometimes, a patient may become allergic to the preservative in their drops or ointment. Then a preservative-free kind of lubricant should be used.

Contact Lenses - You should not wear contact lenses whilst using many types of eye drops as not all lubricants are suitable for use with contact lenses. Check with your doctor or pharmacist. Some types of drops are available without preservative which are suitable for contact lens wearers. It is often the preservative in the drops that causes problems.

Patient Information

Lid hygiene - For some people, regular daily cleaning of the eyelid margins may help to control symptoms.

Punctal plugs - In some severe cases, punctal plugs may be used, to block the tear drainage pathway from the eyes. These allow lubricants to remain longer in the tear film.

Surgery - Very occasionally, surgery may be needed to correct abnormal eyelid function or eyelid positions.

Humidification - Sometimes, a home humidifier may help, or wrap-around glasses to reduce evaporation.

Further Information

You can obtain further information from the R.N.I.B (www.rnib.org.uk)

Coventry Society for the Blind:

33 Earlsdon Avenue South

Earlsdon

Coventry

CV5 6DR

Telephone 024 7671 7522

Alternatively please contact the Eye Unit on 024 7696 6602.

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format please contact 024 7696 6602 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

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Document History

Department:	Eye unit
Contact:	26602
Updated:	September 2019
Review:	September 2022
Version:	4.1
Reference:	HIC/LFT/964/10