

DRY EYE AT A GLANCE

Dry eye is a condition of the eye where either too few tears are produced, or tears drain too quickly from the eye. Symptoms may include eyes that feel itchy, red and dry; eyelids that stick together upon waking; difficulty wearing contact lenses; hay fever or sinus problem; and recurring infections. Left untreated, dry eye may lead to corneal infections and ulcers, conjunctivitis, chalazia and pterygia. The common first treatment for dry eye is eye drops known as "artificial tears". While this treatment is simple, it is not a permanent solution.

Among the common causes of dry eye are irregularities in the blinking process; medications such as antihistamines, decongestants and heart medications. Overexposure to sun, wind, air conditioners, smoke or aerosols; Vitamin A deficiency; or an overly-large drainage canal in the eye may let your tears drain away too quickly.

To determine if surgery is appropriate, tiny temporary "stoppers" are put in the drain holes to force tear film to back up across the surface of the eye. If the dry eye condition improves, punctum plugs may be the next logical step. Occasionally a laser is used to restrict these drain passages.

Either procedure can be performed in the office without a hospital stay.



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A closer look at: **DRY EYE**



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A GUIDE TO DRY EYE

Normally, glands in your eyelids manufacture tears, which are washed across your eye everytime you blink. When your eye produces too few tears, or when the tears drain too quickly from the eye, the resulting condition is called "dry eye".



WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Your eyes may burn or feel itchy, gritty, red and dry, especially later in the day. Difficulty in wearing contact lenses, hay fever or sinus problems and recurring infections may also be associated with a dry eye condition.

CAUSES OF DRY EYE

Among the common causes of dry eye are irregularities in the blinking process. Interestingly, both those who blink frequently and those who blink constantly may experience an imbalance of tears in their eyes.

Medications such as antihistamines, birth control tablets, decongestants and heart medications may also cause dry eye. There have also been some studies, which link Vitamin A deficiency to dry eye syndrome.

Overexposure to sun, wind, air conditioners, smoke or aerosols such as hair spray may aggravate or initiate a dry eye condition. Finally, an overly large punctum (drainage canal) in the eye may let your tears drain away too quickly.

ABOUT TEARS

Tears are very complex liquids produced by glands located behind the upper eyelids, in the conjunctiva and in the eyelids. The films of tears that coat your eye are actually composed of three separate layers. The outer layer, called the lipid layer, is oily to minimize evaporation. The middle, or aqueous layer, contains many substances including Vitamin A and antibacterial agents such as lysozyme and lactoferrin. The mucin layer, which is directly next to the surface of the eye acts as a lubricating coat and binds lysozyme and other substances that protect the eye from infection.

HOW TO GET RELIEF

1. Don't rub
2. Reduce caffeine intake
3. Stop smoking
4. Drink lots of water
5. Tear supplements. Use artificial tears, e.g. Refresh Liquigel, Refresh Tears, Cellufresh, tear gel, Optive (available over the counter)
6. Apply a warm, wet compress to your eye(s) morning and evening to soothe and bathe your eye(s)

7. Install a humidifier in your home/office if it is very dry.
8. Avoid fans/air conditioning blowing directly into your eyes.
9. Take the lowest dose possible of fluid-reducing medicines e.g antihistamines and diuretics (discuss with your doctor).
10. Reduce your contact lens wearing time.
11. Ask your optometrist about changing to different contact lenses
12. Punctal plugs can be used to close the tubes that drain tears from the eye.
13. Some people benefit from a capsule specifically designed for dry eyes. It works by substituting the vital building block molecule for the various layers of the tear film.
14. Increase your supplement intake like:
 - Vitamin A in a natural form
 - Beta-Carotene and Zinc
 - Antioxidants Vitamin C,E & Selenium
 - Calcium

