

Dry Eyes

Information for patients

Ophthalmology Services

Do you have dry eyes?

If your eyes feel tired, sore or gritty, you may have 'dry eyes'. Dry eyes occur when there are not enough tears to keep your eyes lubricated.

Normally eyes are covered with a thin invisible film of tears. Tears are the lubricating 'oil' of the eye surface.

If there are not enough tears, or if the tears do not spread properly across the eyes, the eyes become dry and sore.

They may feel 'scratchy' or 'gritty', as though there is something in them. They may also be a little itchy, and they may be red. Poorly spreading the tears may also be caused by 'Blepharitis' (inflammation of the eyelids); see our leaflet on Blepharitis.

Sometimes your eyes may 'water', there may be enough tears, but the tears do not spread properly. The poor spreading makes the eyes sore, and this makes them water.

Can dry eye damage my eye(s)?

Having dry eye(s) does not damage your eye (unless the eye is extremely dry) See section overleaf **(Very Dry Eyes)**

What is the treatment of dry eyes?

To make your eyes comfortable you need to replenish the natural the natural tear film that protects the surface of the eyes. There is no magic cure. Four types of products are available, and all are harmless: they do not contain any drugs, merely 'oiling' the surface of the eye.

Try the different products out, your doctors can prescribe the products, and the they can also be purchased at pharmacies without prescription as detailed below:

1 - Tear drop preparations in bottles:

These are simple salt solutions with added ingredients which help them spread across the eye. They make the eye more comfortable by lubricating the surface, but the effect does not last all that long.

There are various types of drops that may suit different eyes, so try different types. They are not very effective overnight, and the eyes may be uncomfortable when you wake up.

They May also contain preservatives, this is only a problem if you have very dry eyes when the drop would need to be used quite frequently, and the dose of preservatives increase. Examples include 'Liquifilm', Tears Natural'. Hypromellose'.

2 - Eye Gel Preparations

These are relatively new products, and are the most useful. They last longer than drops, do not cause misty vision, and maybe used at bedtime as they last partly through the night. There are two types 'Gel Tears' and 'Viscotears'.

3 - Eye Ointments

These products are much thicker and easier than eye drops. They stay in the eye much longer; try using them last thing at night. During the day they may cause misty vision. Examples include simple eye ointment.

4 - Tear Drop Preparations without Preservatives

These are particularly useful for people with very dry eyes. Because they have no preservative they can be used more often, even every half hour, without damaging your eyes. One example is 'Minims' tears: the ampoules (mini bottles) contain about 14 drops, and may last a day with practice. They are moderately expensive.

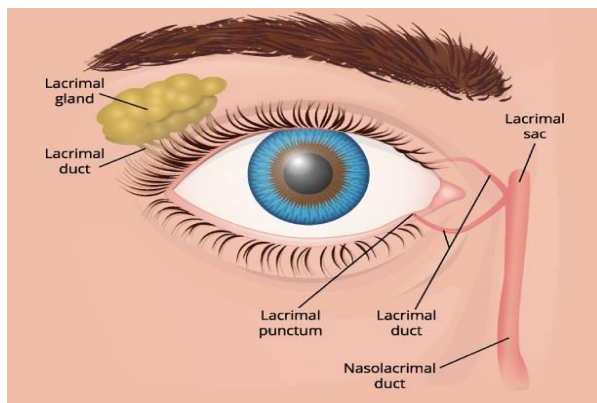
What is the herpes virus?

The herpes simplex virus is very common. Most people have herpetic infection at some time of their lives

However, only in a few unlucky people does the virus affect the cornea. No one knows why some people develop corneal infections not others. (It has nothing to do with sex, that is a different type of herpes).

Where are tears made normally?

Tears are made in the lacrimal gland, flow over the eye surface, draining in to tiny channels in the eyelids, in to the nose.



Tears are made in the gland near the eyeball, and spread over the front of the eyeball, into tear ducts, and then in to the nose.

The main cause of dry eyes is the drying up the lacrimal gland. Anyone can develop dry eye, but it is more common in women, diabetes and the over 45's. Usually the gland still produces tears, but not quite enough. Once damaged, the gland does not generally recover, but tear production can vary.

The gland may also be damaged by the body's immune system. The immune system is meant to fight infections 'germs', but sometimes it becomes over-active. Whilst the immune system may damage the lacrimal gland it does not damage the eye itself. See section overleaf **(Very Dry Eyes)**

What makes your dry eyes more uncomfortable?

Your eyes may feel more uncomfortable in the wind, or any dry hot atmosphere. Contact lenses, or anything that reduces blinking may make dry eyes more uncomfortable, such as watching television, computer screen or sewing.

There are less tears at night, so the eye may be sore and a little sticky in the morning. Disease of the eyelids stops the tears spreading properly and makes the eyes sore. This is Blepharitis.

Some medicines reduce the amount of tears, such as tablets for depression and high blood pressure e.g. water tablets.

Very Dry Eyes

This is a more serious condition, and an ophthalmologist will give you specific advice. The eye is prone to develop ulcers and infections. In addition to the treatment above (including frequent preservative free drops and gel tears), the tear drainage ducts can be blocked with plugs (temporary) or cauterised to seal them (permanent). This saves the tears draining away, and make the eyes a little more comfortable. Ask your ophthalmologist.

Very dry eyes, especially if the mouth is dry as well, may be part of 'Sjogren's' syndrome: a dry mouth can lead to tooth decay. Sjogren's patients may also have joint problems. If your GP, specialist, or dentist suggest you may have Sjogren's disease or syndrome. The British Sjogren's Syndrome Association can provide further advice:

The help line is open: 0121 478 1133

09:30am – 16:00pm, Monday to Wednesday

09:30am – 20:00pm, Thursday and Friday

Please note the helpline is for help and support only, for all other enquires please call the British Sjogren's Syndrome Association (BSSA) office on 0121 478 0222



Further Information and advice can be obtained from:

Maidstone Hospital Eye Clinic

09:00am – 17:00pm, Monday to Friday

Telephone: 01622 226202

Tunbridge Wells Hospital (Pembury) Eye Clinic

Answerphone 01892 633877

09:00am – 17:00pm, Monday to Thursday

Telephone: 01892 633880

09:00am – 13:00pm, Friday


Telephone: 01892 634450

For out of hours ring: 01622 729000, ask for the on-call eye doctor or go to your nearest Emergency Department

NHS 111 - Telephone 111

Visit NHS Choices Online www.nhs.uk

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Telephone: ☎ 01622 224960 or ☎ 01892 632953

Email: mtw-tr.palsoffice@nhs.net

or visit their office at either Maidstone or Tunbridge Wells Hospital between 9.00am and 5.00pm, Monday to Friday.

You can be confident that your care will not be affected by highlighting any areas of concern or making a complaint. The Trust will retain a record of your contact, which is held separately to any medical records. If you are acting on behalf of a patient, we may need to obtain the patient's consent in order to protect patient confidentiality. More information on PALS or making a complaint can be found on the Trust's website: www.mtw.nhs.uk or pick up a leaflet from main reception.

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