

Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals **NHS**

NHS Trust

Oxford Eye Hospital

Dry eyes

Information for patients



What are dry eyes?

The tear film that covers the surface of the eye is produced by glands in the eyelids and around the eye. Tears keep the surface of the eyes wet, which keeps your eyes clean and protects them against infection. If your eyes don't produce enough tears, or if your tears dry up (evaporate) too quickly, this will lead to dry eyes.

What causes dry eyes?

There are many causes of dry eyes, such as age-related changes in the eye, dry or dusty working conditions and central heating. The condition is more likely to affect people over 60 and is more common in women than in men.

Signs and symptoms

- A gritty or scratchy feeling in your eyes
- Soreness
- Feeling as if there is something in your eye
- Itching and burning
- Discomfort or pain
- Often the eye is completely normal to look at.

Treatment

This consists of artificial tear drops to use during the day and possibly some ointment to use last thing at night. Different types of artificial tear drops can be bought over the counter at a chemist without a prescription (they are less expensive than a prescription charge), so you need never run out of drops.

You will need to use the drops quite often at first and then gradually reduce the frequency to just a few times a day to keep your eyes comfortable. You will eventually be able to judge how often you need to use them.

As the drops are used to relieve the symptoms and are not a cure for the condition, you will probably always need to use them.

Sometimes, for severely dry eyes, tiny silicone plugs can be inserted into the little tear drainage channels at the inner corner of each eye. These plugs help to preserve any tears for maximum effect, to keep the eye moist and healthy.

What would happen without treatment?

It is important to treat this condition. Without treatment complications such as scarring of your cornea (the transparent layer at the front of the eye) and conjunctivitis (inflammation, or infection, of your eye) can occur and your eye sight could be permanently affected.

Further information

Further information about dry eyes can be found on the following websites:

http://cks.library.nhs.uk/patient_information_leaflet/dry_eye_syndrome

<http://www.patient.co.uk/showdoc/23068724/>

How to contact us

The nurse will be happy to answer any further questions you may have. Please telephone:

Eye Outpatients Tel: (01865) 231099

If you need an interpreter or need a document in another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221473**.

When we receive your call we may transfer you to an interpreter. This can take some time, so please be patient.

Rebecca Turner, Matron, Specialist Surgery

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Oxford OX3 9DU

www.oxfordradcliffe.nhs.uk

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