



North Shore Eye Centre

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DRY EYE

Understanding Your Condition

What are dry eyes?

A film of tears, spread over the eye by opening and closing the eye, makes the surface of the eye smooth and optically clear. Some people do not produce enough tears to keep the eye in a wet and comfortable condition. This causes burning, pain, itchiness and increased irritation in the eye, especially in dry or smoky conditions. It can also cause problems wearing contact lenses. However, in response to irritation, the tear gland produces excess tear secretion. Hence, overflow tearing can occur, even though the eye is dry.

There are at least two different kinds of tears: those that lubricate the eye and those that are produced when a person is crying as a response to irritation or emotion. Tears that lubricate the eye are produced all day. Tears produced when a person is crying occur when a foreign body irritates the eye or when the person experiences high emotion.

What causes dry eyes?

Dry eyes occur as part of the normal aging process, but are more common in women (especially after menopause) than in men.

Some medications and drugs cause dry eyes. Nevertheless, these medications may be necessary and dry eyes may have to be tolerated or treated with artificial tears. Your ophthalmologist will know the medications that can cause dry eyes.

How are dry eyes diagnosed?

Regular medical examinations by an ophthalmologist help to diagnose dry eyes. Your ophthalmologist might use some tests, such as the placement of paper strips under the lower eyelid, to measure the rate of tear production in your eyes.



How are dry eyes treated?

The most common treatment for dry eyes is the provision of artificial tears. They can be bought without prescription at the pharmacy and may be used as often as necessary. The usage of artificial tears can be from once or twice a day to several times an hour to replace the missing moisture.

Tears leave the eye through tear ducts and go down into the nose. To keep the eye moist, your ophthalmologist can create a blockage at the tear ducts and down the nose to conserve the naturally produced tears.

Adding moisture to the air by applying a humidifier to a radiator when the heat is turned on can also prove helpful. Anything that adds dryness to a room such as heating, smoking or hair dryers will make a person's dry eyes more uncomfortable.

Using ointment at bedtime might help to reduce the scratchiness on first opening the eyes in the morning.

Who can treat dry eyes?

Unless a person has extremely dry eyes, over-the-counter artificial tears might be sufficient. Severe dryness can cause damage to the eye and should be diagnosed and treated by your ophthalmologist.

Why should you have regular eye examinations?

Regular medical eye examinations are very important for everyone, as eye disease can occur at any age. Often the patient does not realize symptoms unless the disease has done damage. An ophthalmologist is the doctor trained, educated and licensed to provide total eye care: medical, surgical and optical. But every doctor works as part of a team with your General Practitioner, Optometrist, Orthoptist and other specialists. Total eye care includes performing comprehensive medical eye examinations, prescribing corrective lenses, diagnosing diseases and disorders of the eye, and using the appropriate medical and surgical procedures necessary for their treatment.

It's your sight – your eyes deserve the best care available!