

MEIBOMIAN CYST / CHALAZION

What is a Meibomian cyst (chalazion)?

A meibomian cyst or chalazion is a swelling in either the upper lid or lower lid. It is caused by the blockage of one of the meibomian glands in the eye lid. The glands secrete oil which helps to lubricate the eye.

What are the symptoms of a chalazion?

It is an unsightly lump that develops on either an upper or lower eyelid and it is possible to have more than one cyst on different eyelids at the same time. Cysts can range in size from very tiny to very large. A cyst can be mildly irritating to very painful. Occasionally a cyst can become infected. Eye sight is not usually affected but if the cyst is very large it may cause pressure on the eyeball and this can cause distorted vision. This will not cause long term harm.

What is the treatment for a chalazion?

- **No treatment.** Most people get better without any treatment. It can take **up to 6 months** or more to resolve and if the cyst is causing no problems it is best to just wait.
- **Antibiotics.** Infected cysts can be treated with antibiotic ointment and occasionally oral antibiotics. The infection will settle but the lump may remain.
- **Hot compresses.** Hot compresses help to ease discomfort. Soak a clean flannel (face cloth) in very hot water and wring out. Press gently but firmly against the affected eye and repeat for 10 minutes twice daily. The warmth and slight pressure softens the contents of the cyst and helps it to drain more easily.
- **Massage.** Massage of the cyst after using a hot compress can encourage the cyst to drain. Do this with a clean finger or cotton bud, in the direction of the eyelashes.
- **Surgery.** A small operation called an Incision and Curettage is an option if the cyst does not go away. Your GP/Family Doctor must refer you to hospital for this. The operation is a minor procedure done as a Day Case. The eyelid is numbed with an injection of anaesthetic. A small cut is made on the inside of the eyelid and the contents of the cyst are released. For a few days afterwards there will be some bruising and swelling and you will have to apply antibiotic ointment.

Are there any complications?

Most cysts cause few problems. A rare complication occurs when an infected cyst spreads to infect the whole eyelid and tissues surrounding the eye. The eyelid becomes very red and so swollen that it is impossible to open. It is very painful and the patient develops a high temperature (fever). The eyeball can look as if it is pushed forward and the eye is sensitive to light. This complication is called orbital cellulitis and requires emergency medical treatment with antibiotics in a hospital.

Will it recur?

It's possible. There are numerous glands in each eyelid and therefore it is possible to develop a new cyst in a different gland.