

DRY EYE

What is Dry Eye?

Dry eye is an eye condition caused by a problem with tears. It can make your eyes feel scratchy, red and irritable. Despite the name, having dry eye can also make your eyes watery. It can make your vision blurry for short periods of time, but the blurriness will go away on its own, or improve when you blink. It can also make it feel as if you've got something in your eye such as an eyelash or a piece of grit, even when there is nothing there.

What are the causes of dry eye?

While dry eye can occur at any age, it is more common in women, especially after the menopause. Changes in hormonal levels such as in pregnancy and menopause can also contribute to the dry eye.

Other causes include:

- Blepharitis and Meibomian gland dysfunction (MGD)
- You don't produce enough tears
- Your tears aren't of the right quality
- Your tears aren't spreading across the front of your eye properly
- Other medications or health conditions (such as rheumatoid arthritis, Sjogrens Syndrome)
- Previous surgery to the eye (for example laser eye surgery)

Dry eye cannot be cured. However there are some treatments that can help your eyes to feel more comfortable. Dry Eye drops (or artificial tears/lubricants) aim to supplement and replace natural tears, and make the eye more comfortable. These drops can be bought over the counter from the pharmacist. Some people prefer to use a thicker gel-like drop. These gels are made from different chemicals and may stay in the eye for longer.

Is there anything I can do to help with dry eye?

Having dry eyes can be difficult, but there are many things that you can try to manage it better:

- Use your eye drops regularly. Your Doctor or Nurse can advise you on this. Finding eye drops that work for you can make a huge difference.
- Adjust your environment. High temperatures and central heating can make tears evaporate more quickly, so sometimes lowering temperatures can help.
- Take rest periods and remember to blink. Many people find that their dry eye is worse when they're reading or using a computer. This is because you blink less when you are doing a task like this, giving the tears more chance to evaporate.
- Many people find that using a warm compress can help.
- Avoid dusty, windy and smoky areas.
- Try to have a healthy balanced diet, with flax seed as well as foods containing omega 3 & 6 (oily fish, nuts, seeds, eggs and green leafy vegetables).
- Avoid using eye make-up when there is infection or inflammation present.
- If you wear contact lenses, have regular follow-ups: you may need a break from wearing contact lenses if your eyes are dry, or explore different types of lenses which may be more suitable for dry eye.