

DRY EYE



What is dry eye?

Some people do not produce enough tears to keep the eye comfortable. This is known as dry eye. Your eye doctor is usually able to diagnose dry eye by examining your eyes.

Tears are produced by two different methods. One method produces tears at a slow, steady rate and is responsible for normal eye lubrication. The other method produces large quantities of tears in response to eye irritation or emotions.

Tears that lubricate are constantly produced by a healthy eye. Excessive tears occur when the eye is irritated by a foreign body or when a person cries.

What are the symptoms of dry eye?

The usual symptoms include:

- Stinging or burning eyes
- Scratchiness
- Stringy mucus in or around the eyes
- Eye irritation from smoke or wind
- Excess tearing
- Difficulty wearing contact lenses

Excess tearing from “dry eye” sounds illogical, but if the tears responsible for maintenance lubrication do not keep the eye wet enough, the eye becomes irritated. When the eye is irritated, the lacrimal gland produces a large volume of tears which overwhelms the tear drainage system. These excess tears then overflow from your eye.

What is the tear film?

A film of tears, spread over the eye by a blink, makes the surface of the eye smooth and clear. Without our tear film, good vision would not be possible.

The tear film consists of three layers:

- An oily layer
- A watery layer
- A layer of mucus

The oily layer smooths the tear surface and reduces evaporation of tears.

The middle watery layer makes up most of what we ordinarily think of as tears. This layer cleanses the eye and washes away foreign particles or irritants.

The inner layer allows the watery layer to spread evenly over the surface of the eye and helps the eye remain wet. Without mucus, tears would not adhere to the eye.

What causes dry eye?

Tear production normally decreases as we age. Although dry eye can occur in both men and women at any age, women are most often affected. This is especially true after menopause.

Dry eye can also be associated with arthritis and accompanied by a dry mouth. People with dry eyes, dry mouth and arthritis are said to have Sjogren’s syndrome.



Our doctors (from left): Matt Oliva, MD • Paul Imperia, MD • Paul Jorizzo, MD
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We’re a full-service eye care practice assisted by an exceptionally qualified staff. Medical Eye Center was founded in 1921 on the principle of preserving the health of our patients and the quality of their vision through comprehensive eye care and surgical services.



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A wide variety of common medications, prescription and over-the-counter, can cause dry eye by reducing tear secretion. Be sure to tell your doctor the names of all the medications you are taking, especially if you are using:

- Diuretics
- Betablockers
- Antihistamines
- Sleeping pills
- Medications for “nerves”
- Pain relievers

People with dry eye are often more prone to the toxic side effects of eye medications, including artificial tears. For example, the preservatives in certain eye drops and artificial tear preparations can irritate the eye. Special preservative-free artificial tears may be required.

Since these medications are often necessary, the dry eye condition may have to be tolerated or treated with “artificial tears”.

How is dry eye treated?

Adding tears

Artificial tears are similar to your own tears. They lubricate the eyes and help maintain moisture.

Artificial tears are available without a prescription. There are many brands on the market, so you may want to try several to find the one you like best.

If you are sensitive to the preservative in artificial tears, or if you need to use them more than every two hours, preservative-free brands are available. Solid artificial tear inserts that are placed inside the lower lid on a daily basis and gradually release lubricants may be beneficial to some people.

You can use the tears as often as necessary — once or twice a day, or as often as several times an hour.

Artificial tears that we recommend:

Bottled with soft Dissipating Preservative

Gentleal-Mild/Moderate
Refresh Tears
Refresh Liquigel
Tears Naturale/Forte
Systane
Soothe
Tears Again Gel Drops

Lubricating Ointment

Refresh PM
Duolube
Gentleal Gel
Tears Again Gel
Muro 128 Ointment

Preservative Free Vials

Bion Tears
Refresh Plus
Refresh Endura
Celluvisc
Tears Naturale Free
Hypo Tears PF
Ocucoat

Omega 3 Fatty Acid Oils

Multiple studies have shown that Omega 3 Fatty Acid Oils help with dry eyes. Usually fish oil or flaxseed oil or a combination of them both works the best. There is one brand made for dry eyes called Thera Tears Nutrition. All are over the counter and the dose is 1000mg per day. This is an oral supplement. Do not put it in your eyes. It will usually take 4-6 weeks to start to get results.

Restasis

This is a prescription medication drop used to increase quality and quantity of your own tears. Restasis is an eye drop that is instilled twice daily. It will usually take 4-6 weeks to start to get an improvement and 6 months for the full effect. Some patients may need to continue taking after 6 months. It is OK to use artificial tears while taking Restasis. The most likely side effect is stinging upon instillation.

Punctal Plugs

Conserving your eyes’ own tears is another approach to keeping the eyes moist.

Tears drain out of the eye through a small channel into the nose (that is why your nose runs when you cry). Your doctor may close these channels either temporarily with punctal plugs or permanently using a cauterization method. The closure conserves your own tears and makes artificial tears last longer.

Punctal Plugs are small silicone devices that are inserted into the lower punctas. The plug acts like a dam. Your tears are made but cannot drain off the eye as quickly, so this thickens and

helps stabilize the tear layer. Insertion of plugs is an in office procedure that is painless and only takes a few minutes. Initially, you may feel the plug, but this sensation goes away in 2-3 days. Some patients will tear too much and the plug can be removed. More plugs can be inserted if there is not enough relief with the first set. If a plug comes out we can insert a larger size.

Other methods

Tears evaporate like any other liquid. You can take steps to prevent evaporation. In winter, when indoor heat is on, a humidifier or a pan of water on the radiator adds moisture to the air. Wrap-around glasses may reduce the drying effect of the wind, but are illegal to wear while driving in some states.

Using hot compresses at least once daily will decrease the evaporation of tears and increase the oily layer of tears.

Anything that may cause dryness, such as an overly warm room, hair dryers, or wind, should be avoided by a person with dry eye. Smoking is especially bothersome.

Some people with dry eye complain of “scratchy eyes” when they wake up. This symptom can be treated by using an artificial tear ointment at bedtime. Use the smallest amount of ointment necessary for comfort, since the ointment can cause your vision to blur temporarily.