

Devon in Sight Eye Condition Fact Sheet 12

Dry Eye

Introduction

Dry eye occurs when your eyes don't make enough tears, or your tears evaporate too quickly. This can make your eyes feel scratchy or irritated, and in severe cases may temporarily make your vision blurry.

Who is affected by dry eye?

Dry eye is more common in women and in people aged over 65. This is because as you get older, your eyelids are not as effective at spreading your tears across your eyes when you blink. Also, the meibomian glands in your eyelids, which produce the oily part of your tears, become less effective and may become blocked. This is a condition called blepharitis.

What are the symptoms of dry eye?

Despite its name, having dry eye can actually cause your eyes to water. This is because the watery layer of your tears will dilute the oiliness of your tears, which reduces their ability to lubricate your eyes.

Symptoms of dry eye include:

- Gritty eyes
- Feeling like something is in your eyes
- Stinging or burning eyes
- Heavy eyelids
- Blurred vision
- Watery eyes (If your eyes water a lot, you may dilute the oily layer of your eyes, causing them to dry out.)

Treatment of dry eye depends on what is causing it.

If your dry eye is caused by your eyes not producing enough tears, you can use eye lubricants. These are available as drops, gels or ointment, and most are available without a prescription from your optometrist or pharmacist. Gels are thicker and stay in your eye for longer. Ointment is generally used for people whose eyes dry out at night because they do not fully close their eyes. Eye lubricants do not contain any drugs and so you can use them as often as you like. However, some contain preservatives which may make your eyes sore. If you are using them more than six times a day you should use preservative-free drops.

If your dry eye is caused because your tears are evaporating too quickly, you can use a spray that you spray on your closed eyelids. This replenishes the oily layer of your tears and stops them evaporating as quickly. The spray is available without prescription from your optometrist or pharmacist.

If you have blepharitis you can treat this by keeping your eyelids clean and using warm compresses on your eyelids to help unblock the glands which produce the oily part of your tears.

You can help to prevent dry eye by:

- keeping your eyes clean and avoiding using makeup, especially eyeliner
- avoiding high temperatures, central heating, draughts (for example, from air vents in cars) and air conditioning
- ensuring you blink often and look away from the screen at regular intervals, when you are using the computer to give your eyes a rest
- using a humidifier to help slow down the evaporation of your tears
- wearing glasses or sunglasses, ideally the wraparound type, on windy days
- avoiding smoky atmospheres
- Having treatment to stop the tears draining away. Small plugs, called punctum plugs, can be put into the holes in your lower eyelids to stop the tears draining away. These can be easily removed if necessary.

Information, Advice and Support

College of Optometrists “Through my eyes video” shows what your vision can be like with Dry Eye.

<https://lookafteryoureyes.org/eye-conditions/dry-eye/>

What to do next?

If you are experiencing any of the above symptoms or your sight loss deteriorates, please contact your GP/Optician/Accident & Emergency Department at your local Hospital.

If you need any further advice call our Helpline: 01392 876 666

Devon in Sight is a member of the **Helpline Partnership Community**.

Credit

We would like to thank the **Royal College of Optometrists** for their kind permission to reproduce this information.

Further Support Available from Devon in Sight

- **Information, Advice and Guidance**
- **Demonstrations of Low Vision Aids & Daily Living Equipment**
- **Assistive Technology Solutions**
- **Our holistic needs assessment (Sight Loss MOT)**
- **Training for people with central vision loss (Skills for Seeing)**

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based on best practice to ensure that information we produce meets the needs of people who are blind or partially sighted and their family and friends.

Devon in Sight is not a medical organisation; therefore we can only provide general information that is not intended to be a substitute for a proper medical assessment. Our information is not intended to be used for individual cases. If you have a specific question about your eye condition, we recommend that you consult an eye care professional.

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Devon in Sight Contact Information



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