

Dry Eye Syndrome

What is dry eye?

Our eyes need tears to stay healthy and comfortable. If your eyes do not make enough tears, it is called Dry Eye Syndrome. Dry eye also happens when tears are not made of the right mix of elements or when the tear film is not as it should be. You can feel as if your eyes are always tearing and that can be a sign of dry eyes.

What are the symptoms of dry eye?

You feel like your eyes are stinging and burning. You have blurry vision, especially when reading. There is a scratchy or gritty feeling like something is in your eye. There are strings of mucus in or around your eyes. Your eyes are red or irritated. This is especially true when you are in the wind or near cigarette smoke. It is painful to wear contact lenses. You have lots of tears in your eyes. Having a lot of tears in your eyes with "dry eye" might sound odd. But your eyes make more tears when they are irritated by dry eye.

How is dry eye treated?

Adding tears. Your ophthalmologist might tell you to use artificial tears. These are eye drops that are like your own tears. You can use artificial tears as often as you need to. You can buy artificial tears without a prescription. There are many brands. Try a few until you find a brand that works best for you. If you use artificial tears more than six times a day or are allergic to preservatives, you should use preservative-free tears. This is because if the tears with preservatives are used a lot, these chemicals may start to irritate your eyes.

Saving tears. Your ophthalmologist may suggest blocking your tear ducts. This makes your natural tears stay in your eyes longer. Tiny silicone or gel plugs (called punctal plugs) may be inserted in your tear ducts. These plugs can be removed later as needed. Your ophthalmologist could also recommend surgery that permanently closes your tear ducts.

Increasing your tears. Your ophthalmologist might have you use a prescription eye drop medication. This helps your eyes make more of their own tears.

What causes dry eye?

People tend to make fewer tears as they get older due to hormonal changes. Both men and women can get dry eye. However, it is more common in women—especially those who have gone through menopause. Here are some other causes of dry eye:

- Certain diseases, such as rheumatoid arthritis, Sjögren's syndrome, thyroid disease, and lupus
- Blepharitis (when eyelids are swollen or red) Entropion (when eyelids turn in); ectropion (eyelids turn outward),
- Being in smoke, wind or a very dry climate.
- Looking at a computer for a long time, reading and other activities that reduce blinking.
- Using contact lenses for a long time.
- Having refractive eye surgery, such as LASIK.
- Taking certain medicines such as allergy and cold medicines (antihistamines), Sleeping pills,
- Anxiety medications, antidepressant medicines, Heartburn medicines.