

BLEPHARITIS

What is blepharitis?

Blepharitis is a common eye problem whereby inflammation of the eyelids causes irritation, itching, swelling and sometimes a red eye.

Blepharitis can occur in childhood and continue throughout life as a chronic condition, or develop later in life as an adult.

This condition often occurs in people who have a tendency towards oily skin, dandruff or dry eyes.

Blepharitis is caused by a type of bacteria that lives on the skin surface, or by skin conditions such as atopic dermatitis or acne rosacea.

Blepharitis cannot be spread to other people.

The condition is not usually serious, but can lead to other problems, such as dry eyes, eyelid cysts and conjunctivitis if not treated.

Symptoms of blepharitis

Blepharitis symptoms often come and go, and include the following:

- Sore eyes
- Itchy eyes
- A gritty feeling in the eyes
- Flakes/crusts around the base of the eyelashes
- Red eyes or eyelids
- Eyelids sticking together in the morning on waking

How is blepharitis treated?

Blepharitis is a condition that cannot be cured, but can be controlled with a few simple daily measures:

- **Warm compresses/massage**
Twice a day; wet a cloth with warm water, wring it out, and place it over the closed eyelids for a minute. Reheat the cloth a few times with warm water as it cools. This softens and loosens the scales and debris. It also helps liquefy the oily secretions from the oil glands in the eyelids, and that helps prevent the development of eyelid cysts.
- **Eyelid cleaning/scrubs**
Gently clean/scrape the base of the eyelashes with a cotton bud dipped in a lukewarm, dilute solution of baby shampoo. It is very important to clean the edges of the eyelids, so pull the lower eyelid downwards and the upper eyelid upwards when scrubbing.
- If an **antibiotic ointment** has been prescribed, apply some ointment at the base of the lashes (usually at bedtime), using your fingertip or a cotton bud.

Additional measures may include:

- **Artificial tears** can relieve the irritative symptoms.
- **Steroid eye drops** may be used for short periods to decrease inflammation.
- **Antibiotic eye drops/ointments** can be used to treat bacterial infections.

Continue to clean your eyes daily, even if your symptoms clear up.