

DRY EYE

What is dry eye?

A healthy eye constantly produces good quality tears: these tears lubricate the surface of the eye and ensure comfortable eyes and clear vision. Some people do not produce enough tears, or tears of a good enough quality, to keep the eye(s) comfortable. Most people find it strange to learn that excessive tearing can also be a symptom of dry eyes! If the tears responsible for normal lubrication do not keep the eye wet enough, it becomes irritated and produces excessive “watery” tears in response to this.

What causes dry eye

- Dry eye affects men and women of any age, but post-menopausal women are more frequently affected.
- Tear production decreases with age, making dry eye more common with increasing age.
- Dry eyes can be associated with or aggravated by numerous environmental factors; such as wind, smoke, air-conditioners and heaters.
- Dry eyes can also be associated with arthritis and other auto-immune conditions.
- A wide variety of common medications can cause or worsen dry eyes; such as diuretics (water tablets), beta-blockers, antihistamines, sleeping tablets, antidepressants, and pain tablets.

Symptoms of dry eye

- Stinging or burning of the eye(s)
- Scratchiness/grittiness of the eye(s)
- Stringy mucous in or around the eyes
- Eye irritation from smoke or wind
- Excessive tearing of the eye(s)
- Difficulty wearing contact lenses

Treatment of dry eye

1. Add tears

Artificial tear eye drops can be used to lubricate the eyes, and are available without a prescription. Preservative-free eye drops are available for individuals sensitive to preservatives. If you need to use artificial tears more than every 2 hours, it would be better for you to use a preservative-free eye drop. You can use artificial tears as often as is necessary to relieve your symptoms; from once a day to several times an hour.

2. Conserve tears

Tears drain from the eye into the nose via a small canal (that is why your nose runs when you cry). These canals can be temporarily or permanently closed; this will allow your own tears or artificial tears to stay on the eye for longer.

3. Reduce evaporation

Like any other fluid, tears too evaporate and steps can be taken to prevent the evaporation of tears. In winter, a humidifier or container of water near a heater adds moisture to the hot and dry

eye. Wrap around glasses/sunglasses may reduce the drying effect of the wind. Overly warm rooms, air conditioning, hair dryers and wind all cause dryness and should be avoided.

4. Avoid irritants

Smoke is a potent ocular irritant, and should be avoided.

Certain **vitamin supplements** and **Omega 3** may help in some people.