

# DRY EYE SYNDROME

You develop dry eye syndrome when your eyes don't make enough tears, or the tears evaporate too fast. This makes your eyes dry out and they may become red, swollen and irritated. Anyone can get dry eye syndrome, though it is more common as you get older.

Dry eye syndrome usually affects both eyes. Symptoms include:

- your eyes feeling dry, gritty or sore, which gets worse throughout the day
- burning and red eyes
- your eyelids sticking together when you wake up
- blurred vision, which usually gets better when you blink.

Sometimes you may also have watering eyes, because your eyes are producing more tears to relieve the discomfort.

Most people have mild symptoms, but in severe cases dry eye syndrome is painful and may cause other problems.

## How can I treat dry eyes?

**Keep your eyes clean** and help the glands around them to produce oily tears. Try following the 3 steps below 2 times a day at first, then once a day when your eyes begin to feel better:

### Step 1. Warm compresses:

- boil some water and leave it to cool to a warm temperature
- soak a clean cloth or cotton wool pad in the warm water
- close your eyes and place the cloth or pad on them for 5-10 minutes
- reheat the cloth or pad by soaking it in the warm water; don't let it become cold.

### Step 2. Eyelid massage:

- Close your eyes and gently massage your eyelids using your little finger to draw circles across each lid.
- Take a cotton wool bud and, with your eyes shut, gently roll it downwards on the upper eyelid towards the lashes and edges of your eyelids – this helps to push oil out of your glands, although you won't see anything come out.
- Repeat this process along the whole width of your upper and lower eyelids.
- This process may irritate your eyes slightly at first, a bit like getting soap in them, but this is normal and should get better with time.

### Step 3. Eyelid margin hygiene:

Buy an eyelid cleaning solution, or make one yourself by filling a bowl with boiled water, let it cool to a warm temperature and add a few drops of baby shampoo or a teaspoon of bicarbonate of soda.

- Soak some clean cotton wool in the cleaning solution and use it to remove any crustiness from around your eyelids. Pay special attention to your eyelashes.
- Repeat this process if necessary using a clean piece of cotton wool.
- Dip a clean cotton bud into the cleaning solution and gently wipe it along the bases and lengths of your eyelashes to clean the edges of your eyelids.

**Lubricate your eyes using eye drops or eye ointment.** These are often called artificial tears. Some contain preservatives to stop bacteria growing inside the bottle. If you need to use the eye drops more than 6 times a day, it may be better for you to use preservative-free eye drops. Your pharmacist or optometrist will help you to choose a product that suits you.

- Use your eye drops 3 to 4 times a day. If you have been given hypromellose eye drops you may first need to use them more frequently, for example, hourly. As your eyes start to feel better you will not need to use the hypromellose eye drops so often.
- It's best to use eye ointments such as liquid paraffin/white soft paraffin eye ointment at night. Ointments can blur your vision. Don't use eye drops for glaucoma or other conditions at the same time as using your eye ointment because the drops might not work as well as usual. Use your eye drop first, then wait 5 minutes before putting on your eye ointment.

### How do I use my eye drops or ointment?



First, wash your hands.

Gently pull down your lower eyelid and look upwards.



Hold the dropper above your eye and squeeze 1 drop into the space between your eyeball and lower eyelid. If you are using eye ointment, hold the tube upside down near your eye and squeeze a line of ointment along the inside of your lower eyelid.



Let go of your eyelid, tilt your head downwards, and keep your eye closed for 2 to 3 minutes.

## What else can help?

- Protect your eyes from wind, hot air, smoke and dust. Some people use wrap-around glasses to do this.
- Use a humidifier to moisten the air. This may be particularly helpful if you spend a lot of time in air-conditioned environments.
- Stop smoking and avoid smoky environments.
- Avoid wearing eye make-up, especially eye liner. If you want to use eye make-up, choose one that washes off easily and buy new eye make-up every 3 to 4 months.
- Try to wear your contact lenses for shorter periods, especially if they irritate your eyes.
- Avoid eye strain when you use your computer or laptop by: placing the monitor at or below eye level, not staring at the screen, and taking a break from your computer screen every hour.
- Ask your pharmacist to check any medicines you're taking, because some medicines may make your dry eye syndrome worse.

Include foods containing omega 3 and omega 7 fats in your diet; these may help to prevent or reduce dry eye syndrome. Examples include: oily fish, nuts and seeds, vegetable oils, soya and soya products. Some people should be careful about the amount of oily fish they eat, so check with your doctor or pharmacist first.

## Do I need to see my optometrist?

You may be able to have a free Eye Health Examination with an optometrist. [\*Eye Health Examination Wales\*](#) has a list of optometrists, or ask your pharmacist for more information.

See an optometrist if:

- you've used the treatments suggested for 4 to 6 weeks, but your eyes still feel uncomfortable
- your dry eye symptoms are new and mild, but won't go away. The optometrist will examine you to check whether your symptoms are caused by a different problem.
- you have damaged your eye, or you have a medical condition that is linked to dry eyes, such as glaucoma or Sjögren's syndrome
- your vision has got worse
- you have very painful or red eyes
- your eyes are very sensitive to light.

## Do I need to see a doctor?

Probably not, but some people with severely dry eyes do need to be seen for further assessment and management through the Hospital Eye Services. Your optometrist will be able to refer you if this is necessary.

## Where can I find further information?

Eye Health Examination Wales: [www.eyecare.wales.nhs.uk/eye-health-examination-wales](http://www.eyecare.wales.nhs.uk/eye-health-examination-wales)

NHS Direct Wales: [www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk)

NHS Direct Wales Tel: 0845 4647 (open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

Calls from landlines and mobiles cost 2p per minute, in addition to telephone providers access charge.