

Blepharitis

Blepharitis is a chronic inflammation of the eyelids. It is one of the most common disorders of the eye and is often the underlying reason for eye discomfort, redness and tearing. Blepharitis can begin in early childhood and continue throughout your life, or it can develop later in life.

In persons with blepharitis, the upper and lower eyelids are coated with oily debris and bacteria near the base of the eyelashes, causing irritation and inflammation.

Symptoms

The symptoms of blepharitis can vary from mild to severe. Sometimes there is only minor irritation or itching, but some people experience redness, stinging, tearing and burning. Other symptoms include sensitivity to light, or a sandy, gritty sensation in the eye that is worst upon waking. Blepharitis can lead to more serious complications, such as inflammation of the eye tissues, particularly the cornea.

There are three forms of blepharitis, Staphylococcal, Seborrheic and Meibomian Gland Dysfunction. Each can cause the listed eye irritations listed above, and also has the following symptoms...

- ♦ Staphylococcal - scaling and crusting along the eyelashes
- ♦ Seborrheic – greasy scaling along the eyelashes
- ♦ MGD – pouting and plugging of the Meibomian gland openings in the eyelids

Causes

Bacteria reside on the surface of everyone's skin. In some people, this bacteria is overactive at the base of the eyelashes, resulting in irritation and the formation of scales and particles along the lashes and eyelids. Blepharitis is often associated with the over-activity of oil glands near the eyes.

Blepharitis is more common in people who have a tendency toward oily skin, dandruff or dry eyes. It is also frequently associated with skin conditions such as seborrheic dermatitis and rosacea. Use of an oral medication for severe acne, isotretinoin, has also been associated with blepharitis.



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Treatment

There is no cure for the chronic condition of blepharitis, but the symptoms can be treated and controlled. Treatment consists of 2 phases, the acute phase and the maintenance phase. In the acute phase, we use intensive therapy to bring the disease under control. This may involve the short-term use of steroid eye drops to lessen inflammation and antibiotics (either taken internally or used as an ointment) to decrease the bacterial content of the eyelids.

The maintenance phase is the treatment that will best keep the disease under control. It involves daily care of your eyes and eyelids through warm compresses and eyelid cleaning. At least twice a day, you will use a wet, warm washcloth as a compress to soften and loosen scales and debris around the eye and to liquefy oily secretions from the eyelid's glands. If you have MGD type blepharitis, we will also teach you how to massage your eyelids during the use of the compresses in order to keep the Meibomian glands unclogged.

After the compresses, you will then clean the eyelids with a washcloth to remove debris in which bacteria could grow and to help reduce tear evaporation so that your eyes don't become dry.

These simple, daily hygiene and massage techniques are the key to controlling the symptoms of blepharitis. They will also decrease the need for other medications.