

Dry Eye Syndrome

One of the most common eye problems we treat is Dry Eye Syndrome. Dry eyes are usually caused by a problem with the quality of the tear film that lubricates the eyes.

Tears are comprised of three layers...

- ◆ The Mucus Layer - coats the cornea
- ◆ The Middle Aqueous Layer - provides moisture, supplies oxygen and other nutrients
- ◆ The Outer Lipid Layer - an oily film that seals the tear film on the eye and helps prevent evaporation

When you blink, your eyelids spread tears over your eyes. Tears lubricate your eyes and are also produced as a reflex response to stimuli such as an injury or emotion. Reflex tears do little to soothe dry eyes, which is why someone with Dry Eye Syndrome can have watery eyes.

Symptoms

If you experience visual or eye discomfort after reading, watching television or working on the computer, or if your vision seems blurred but clears temporarily after blinking, you may be suffering from Dry Eye Syndrome. Dry Eye Syndrome can also cause burning, irritation, itching, redness and excessive tearing.

Causes

Many things can cause Dry Eye Syndrome. One of the most common is the normal aging process. As you age, your body naturally produces less oil, so the oily layer of your tears doesn't seal the watery layer as well, allowing evaporation and leaving your eyes drier. Since women tend to produce less oil on their skin, women are more prone to Dry Eye Syndrome than men.

External conditions, such as weather, wind, dry air, air conditioning and smoke, can cause your eyes to be dry. Working on the computer or reading for long periods of time can also cause dryness. Other conditions that can cause eye dryness include wearing contact lenses, the hormonal changes of menopause, some medications and health conditions such as thyroid, vitamin A deficiency, Parkinson's Disease and Sjogren's Disease.



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Treatment

The first thing we'll do is examine your eyes to determine the underlying cause of your symptoms. To do this, we measure the production, evaporation rate and quality of your tear film. We also evaluate the amount of tears your eyes produce.

We may prescribe artificial tears. For patients with extremely dry eyes, we may also prescribe an eye ointment to be applied at bedtime. We may also suggest blocking the opening of the tear drain in the eyelid with special inserts. These are called punctal plugs and they trap your tears on your eyes so that your eyes stay moist.

There are also behavioral changes that may help alleviate the symptoms of dry eye. Drinking plenty of water (eight to ten glasses) every day can help keep your body and your eyes hydrated. You may also need to learn to blink frequently. If you read or work on the computer for long periods of time, you should take frequent breaks to rest your eyes and to blink. Also, don't rub your eyes when they're irritated, as this will only make the symptoms worse.

If you wear contact lenses, you'll need to be sure that you follow instructions for handling and for protecting your eyes from infection. Contacts absorb tear film and proteins may form on the surface of the lens. It's important to follow instructions for soaking and cleaning your lenses.

Our treatment for dry eyes is very individualized. Each patient has different needs and different causes for their dry eyes. The treatments and/or methods that alleviate symptoms also will be different for different patients. We want to find a way to ease your dry eye symptoms, but we're also concerned with keeping your eyes healthy, so we'll need you to work with us to determine what helps and what makes your symptoms worse.