

Tears and Dry Eyes

What is dry eye?

Dry eye is a condition of lack of adequate lubrication in the eye. Stinging, burning, and a feeling of something in your eyes are the most common symptoms. Other symptoms include a pin prick sensation or blurry vision until they blink. There are two types of dry eyes:

Tear insufficiency (inflammatory) dry eyes

The eyes do not produce enough tears. This type often occurs with systemic diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis or lupus.

Evaporative dry eyes

The composition of the tears allows the tears to evaporate too quickly. This type often occurs in the elderly. Evaporative dry eyes are more common in women than in men.

What causes dry eyes?

The exact cause of dry eyes is often difficult to determine. The most common causes of dry eyes are aging, contact lenses, systemic diseases, eyelid disease, medications, and dry environments. Regardless of the cause, dry eyes will be either a tear insufficiency type or an evaporative type. Dry eye treatment depends on the type of dry eyes.

Your tears are complex!

Natural tears are composed of three complex layers. These layers of tears are produced by the lacrimal gland and glands in the eyelids. Diseases that affect any of these glands upset the delicate balance of our tears and can result in dry eyes.

Treatment

There is no cure for dry eyes, only treatment.

The most common treatment is using **artificial tears**. Artificial tears are special eye drops that are formulated to lubricate the eye surface to relieve the stinging and burning associated with dry eyes. These drops are available over-the-counter in many different formulations.

The next tier of treatment is **punctal plugs**. Our natural tears drain out of our eyes through small tubes in your eyelids called puncta. By plugging these tubes with small silicon plugs, the tears will stay in the eyes much longer. These punctal plugs can also help by keeping artificial tears in the eye longer. Sometimes permanent punctal occlusion is necessary and this can be done surgically.

Untreated or undertreated dry eye can result in a serious condition called keratitis. Your eye doctor will check the front of the eye for a condition called keratitis. Although it is rare, a severe form of keratitis called ulcerative keratitis can result in blindness.

Tears and Dry Eyes (continued)

If you have dry eyes you should:

- Use your artificial tears at least every 2 hours!!
- Drink plenty of water because dehydration makes it harder for your lacrimal glands to produce natural tears
- Keep your eyelids clean with daily hygiene to allow proper composition of your tears
- Visit you eye doctor if you have eye pain to be sure you do not have ulcerative keratitis
- Stay with it. **Making sure your eyes have plenty of help is the key to success!**

