

Blocked tear duct in babies and young children (Congenital nasolacrimal duct obstruction)

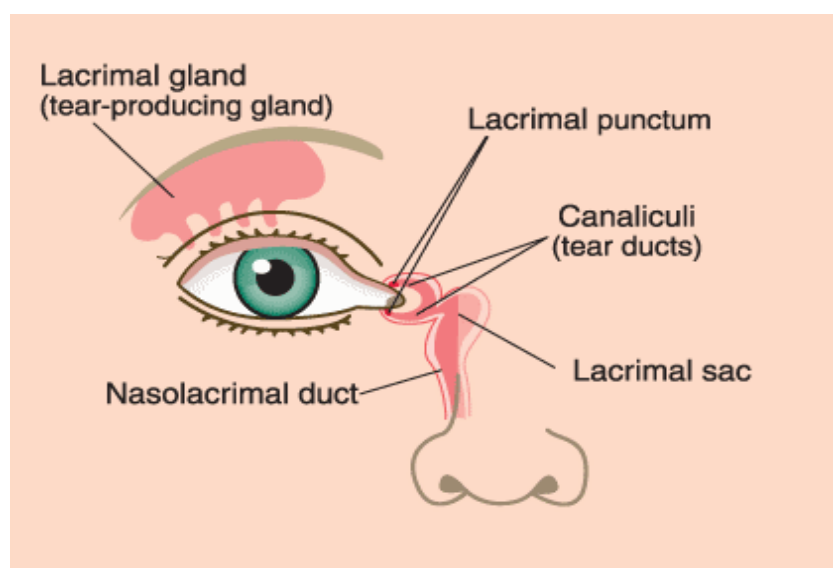
A guide for parents and guardians

What causes the blocked tear duct?

When your child's eyes persist in watering or have repeated episodes of stickiness, it is either due to making too many tears for example crying, or having a blockage in the tear drainage system (nasolacrimal system). The most common cause in watering eyes of new-borns is a delay in the normal development of the nasolacrimal system. It can affect one or both eyes.

Normal drainage of tears

The surface of the eye is very sensitive, and is protected by the tear film. The tears drain down small channels called canaliculi on the inner part of each eyelid into a tear sac. From the tear sac they flow down through the nasolacrimal duct (NLD) into the nose.



What can I do to help?

The NLD is usually developed by the age of 12 months and the symptoms will often settle by this time. You can encourage tear flow and tear duct development by massaging the area on the inside of the upper lid(s) by firm pressure every day. Stickiness and discharge can be cleared away using clean water and cotton wool. Antibiotics are not needed unless the eye itself becomes red.

What if it does not get better?

If the symptoms do not get better by 12-18 months of age, then an eye specialist may perform a procedure called syringe and probing under general anaesthetic (your child will be asleep). This procedure uses a very thin instrument which is passed into the tear duct to open it. The procedure is usually successful. You may have already been referred to the specialist by your GP.

Occasionally, a second attempt at syringe and probing is required for the procedure to be successful. Rarely, syringe and probing will not be enough and your child will require further operations, such as placement of a stent (small tube) to hold the passage on the NLD open, this will be discussed in more detail if it is required.

If you have any questions or need any further information, please contact:
Paediatric Sister on (0161) 701 8244 Monday - Friday 8.30 am -5.00 pm.

Further Information

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