

Information for Patients

Blepharitis

The doctor or nurse practitioner has said you have a condition of your eyelids called blepharitis (pronounced blef-a-ry-tis).

What is blepharitis?

Blepharitis is a chronic (long-term) recurring inflammatory condition of the eyelids. It usually affects both eyelids and can affect people of any age. If blepharitis is not treated, it will not improve, and your symptoms will remain. Blepharitis usually involves the eyelid margins (the edges of the eyelid) and may present alongside conjunctivitis. The cause is often a bacterial infection such as staphylococcus aureus or staphylococcus epidermis. It may also be present alongside poor hygiene, allergy (medicines or make-up), dandruff, too much oil from the meibomian glands (tiny oil glands in the eyelid) and acne rosacea (a skin condition).

What are the signs and symptoms?

- Eyelid irritation
- Reddened eyelids
- Swelling of the eyelid margin
- Visible scales on the eyelashes
- Burning sensation
- Itching
- Loss of eyelashes
- Feeling that a foreign body is present
- Sticky eyelids when waking up in the mornings
- Eye dryness because the tear film is of poor quality
- Watery eye due to irritation of the eye surface

What is the treatment?

Most people need to follow a simple routine of eyelid care. You wipe away bacteria and deposits from the eyelid margins and 'express' the eyelid glands. If you do this carefully as we describe below, you should be able to keep the condition under control without using medicines.

What you will need for your cleaning routine

- **Hot water**
- **A warm compress – can be warm dry or wet clean towels, eye-specific heat packs are available from pharmacies (eyebag, blephasmask) but should be covered with washable covers before use**
- **You may prefer to use an eyelid specific cleaning solution which are available in wipe forms or solutions to apply to clean cotton pads.**
- **Clean cotton buds and cotton pads**

Cleaning your eyelids

Always wash your hands thoroughly before and after you have cleaned your eyelids.

Remove your contact lenses if you wear them.

Below, we explain these 3 things that you need to do once or twice a day:

- Apply a warm compress.
- Gently massage your eyelids.
- Clean the eyelid margins.

Apply a warm compress

- Apply a warm compress for 5-10 minutes, twice a day. This can provide some relief from the soreness and itching. Simply moisten a clean facecloth under a running tap of hot water (as hot as you can stand) and then place it over the eyelids for at least 5 minutes. Reheat the compress regularly by soaking it in hot water, so that the flannel go cool. The warmth melts the oils in the stagnated eyelid glands. Do

this twice a day for 2 months, then several times a week (even after your eyelids are clear of the crusting). This will help prevent the condition returning.

- Some people prefer a microwavable eye mask instead of a warm compress. Make sure you clean the eye mask before and after use. It's important to carefully follow the maker's guidelines if you use an eye mask, to prevent burning your skin.

Gently massage your eyelids

- Close your eyes. Gently massage your closed eyes by rolling your little finger over them in a circular motion. This helps push the melted oil from the glands. It's called 'expressing' the glands. You can't see the oil as the droplets are tiny.
- Next, take a cotton wool bud. With your eyes closed, gently roll the cotton bud sideways along the whole length of your upper eyelids. Repeat this along the whole length of your lower eyelids. This will help remove all the waste from your eyelid margins after the heat has dissolved the fat in the oil.
- If the oil has been stagnant in the glands for a long time, its chemical structure may have changed. So, when the oil drains onto the surface of your eye after you have expressed it, you may get irritation, a bit like having soap in your eyes. This is normal. It should get better with time as you get the blepharitis under control.

Clean the eyelid margins

- Wipe the expressed oil from your eyelid margins. This also helps reduce bacteria, dust and grime (that gathers along your eyelids when you blink) and any remaining crusts.
- There is some mixed evidence on the use of diluted baby shampoo to clean your eyelids. Cleaning using only cooled boiled water is very effective on its own. You could also use a commercial lid-cleaning solution – several products are available from the dispensing opticians at Manchester Royal Eye Hospital or from your local optician or pharmacy.
- Soak clean lint-free make-up remover pads in the warm solution. Remove crustiness from around your eyelids. Pay special attention to your eyelashes. Throw away the make-up remover pad. If necessary, repeat with a clean make-up remover pad. Pay special attention to the roots of your eyelashes, the bases of your eyelashes and the full length of your eyelashes.

- If you find that cleaning products or shampoo make your eyes dry, use commercial products such as Blephasol lotion or Blephaclean wipes.

Helpful tips

- The above hygiene steps are important. Keep following them even if you think the condition has cleared. Wash your face at least twice a day. Keep your hair and eyebrows clean and free of dandruff. Using an anti-dandruff shampoo will help.
- Never share towels and facecloths. Ideally, use clean ones each day.
- If you wear eye make-up, fully remove it before going to bed.
- Don't share your eye make-up or use anybody else's.
- Once the condition has cleared, clean your eyelid margins once or twice a week in the same way.
- Use any prescribed medications as directed

Are other treatments available?

- Antibiotic ointment may be prescribed in short courses to get the condition under control. If so, rub the ointment into your eyelid after doing your eyelid hygiene. Only use the ointment for the prescribed time.
- Antibiotic tablets such as doxycycline may be prescribed if you have skin-related problems; however, for most patients they are not needed.
- Eyelid solutions and wipes are available commercially but not on the NHS. If you want to know more about these products, please speak to the practitioner treating you, your family doctor (GP) or a local optician.
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Are there any complications with blepharitis?

Complications can include:

- chronic infection
- loss of eyelashes
- trichiasis (ingrowing lashes)
- conjunctivitis
- corneal ulceration

- eyelid scarring
- cancellation of planned surgery or injections.

Will the blepharitis return?

Probably, if you stop your eyelid cleaning regime. Some people have to carry on with treatment for a long time to prevent it returning, sometimes forever. If the symptoms return and you have stopped cleaning your eyelids, start again and keep going.

This is not an emergency or urgent condition. Please do not visit the Emergency Eye Department unless your eye is red or painful and you have followed the advice in this leaflet.

However, if you do need emergency treatment, you can contact the Emergency Eye Department, which is open from 8am to 8pm every day. Outside these hours, please contact Ward 55, which is open 24 hours a day. These departments can be contacted via the hospital switchboard on (0161) 276 1234. Ask to be put through to the Emergency Eye Department or the ward.