

Information for Patients

Dry Eyes

What is dry eye?

You have been diagnosed as having dry eye/s. This means that your eyes may not be making enough tears or that the tears which you are making are of a poor quality.

Although this may sound like a minor condition – if not managed appropriately can significantly impact your quality of life.

The normal function of the tears is to keep the surface of the eye wet and nourished, so any shortage of tears or reduction in their quality can make your eyes feel sore, gritty or as if they are burning. Your eyes may appear red or “bloodshot” particularly in the mornings and evenings.

Dry eye/s can be associated with ageing and once the ability to produce quality tears is lost it rarely returns. It can also be linked with other conditions such as arthritis.

What is the treatment?

Dry eye/s is treated with artificial tears and sometimes lubricating ointment. Artificial tear drops can moisten your eyes and relieve discomfort. The doctor or nurse practitioner will advise you on how frequently you will need to use your drops. Initially this may be every hour or more frequently.

If your eyes dry out during the night, you may find it difficult to open them in the morning and your eyelids may stick together. Using a lubricating ointment on your eyes before you go to bed may help; the doctor or nurse practitioner will advise you.

Your treatment must be used regularly. If you stop using it, your symptoms will come back.

Lifestyle changes linked to improvements in dry eye/s

Stopping smoking or vaping, taking Omega-3 supplements, reducing screen time or taking regular screen breaks can make a difference in your condition. Warm compresses and lid hygiene can also promote healthy production of the oily element of your tears.

Try to avoid dry, dusty or smoky places as these make dry eyes worse. Using room humidifiers may help.

Occasionally the dryness is very severe and treatment with drops and ointment does not work. There are other treatments available. You should ask the doctor or nurse treating you or ask your GP to refer you to a consultant ophthalmologist.

Take your eye drops with you if you are going away from home. Always keep a spare bottle so that you do not run out.

It is important that you use a new bottle of eye drops or ointment every 4 weeks, even if the bottle or tube is not empty. This helps to prevent contamination and possible infection. Please remember to wash your hands before and after treatment.