

Dry Eye

Keratoconjunctivitis sicca or dry eye syndrome is the most common cause of eye irritation in people aged 65 and over.

What is dry eye syndrome?

Dry eye syndrome occurs when the quality or quantity of your tears are insufficient to keep the surface of the cornea moist.

Every time we blink the eyelid spreads tears across the surface of the eye. These tears drain away through the puncta (small openings in your eye lid) into your nose where they evaporate.

If tear production is reduced or inhibited in some way our eyes will dry out and cause a painful irritation.

Diabetics have a 50/50 chance of suffering from the condition and half of all contact lens wearers experience symptoms of dry eye syndrome. The elderly are also a high risk group with one in seven people aged 65 and over suffering.

Women are also most likely to be affected by the condition, which is often prevalent during the menopause. Other causes of dry eye include side-effects to medicines, illness and damage to your eyelid caused by disease or injury.

Common symptoms

Dry eye is a painful conditions characterised by the following symptoms:

- a sandy-gritty irritation that gets worse as the day goes on
- dryness
- a burning sensation
- itchy, red or tired eyes
- a feeling that you have some dust in your eye

Diagnosis

Your local optician can diagnose dry eye syndrome during a routine sight test. He or she will use a slit lamp to examine the cornea and check that it is sufficiently moist.

Treatment

Treatment for this painful condition is relatively straightforward. Your optometrist can advise on and supply a range of artificial tears and eye ointments to soothe and lubricate the eye.

Factsheet

The Eyecare Trust is a registered charity that exists to promote awareness of all aspects of eye health. For more information call our public information line on 0845 129 5001 or log on to www.eyecaretrust.org.uk



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Over-the-counter sprays that help re-establish the film of tears and prevent loss of moisture are also available from most pharmacies.

Alternatively, your optometrist may advise you about 'punctum plugs,' a plug that is inserted into your tear duct to stop tears draining away.

Patients are given a local anaesthetic before silicone plugs are inserted into the puncta. This surgery can be performed by your optometrist.

As well as treating the condition with drops or artificial tears sufferers can minimise the symptoms of dry eye by making some small changes to their lifestyle.

These include:

- Eating a diet rich in Omega-3 fatty acids.
- Keeping hydrated. Drink plenty of fluids (at least two litres a day).
- Avoiding air conditioned atmospheres where the air is artificially dry.

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