

Dry Eye Self-Care Leaflet

You have been given this leaflet because you have mild or moderate dry eye symptoms. Dry eye syndrome is a common condition that occurs when the eyes do not make enough tears, or the tears evaporate quickly leading to the eyes drying out and becoming red, swollen, and irritated.

Dry eyes can be caused by many factors including aging, laser eye surgery, hormonal changes and wearing contact lenses. Reading, writing, or working on a computer (you may blink less often) may also lead to the eyes becoming dry. Side-effects of some medicines may contribute to dry eye symptoms, as well as medical conditions such as blepharitis, Sjögren's syndrome, contact dermatitis or arthritis. Additionally, environmental factors such as exposure to the sun, wind, or a dry climate are also a known cause.

Treatment for this is available "over the counter" (OTC) from pharmacies and supermarkets. Most people can treat themselves with OTC products and self-care measures.

Managing Dry Eyes

In addition to dry eye products, there are practical steps you can take to help relieve your symptoms:

1. Apply a warm compress (this loosens the oil produced by glands):

- Boil water and leave it to cool to room temperature.
- Soak a clean flannel or eye pad in the water and place on the closed eyes for 10 minutes.
- Gently massage the upper and lower lids in an up and down motion encouraging flow of oils from the lids into the tear film
- Dry Eye Masks are available but should be self-funded; speak with your optician or pharmacy for more information. These masks can be warmed in a microwave before use.

2. Maintain good eyelid hygiene: Wipe away any crusts or grime that may have accumulated if you have blepharitis. Your optometrist (optician) or pharmacist can tell you how to do this.

- Eyelid-cleaning solutions and wipes are available to buy, or you can try making one at home. For a homemade solution, fill a bowl with one pint of boiled water and allow it to cool to a warm temperature. Then add a teaspoon of bicarbonate of soda.
- Soak clean cotton wool in the solution and remove crustiness from around the eyelids and eyelashes, repeat if necessary, using a clean piece of cotton wool.

3. Environmental & Other Factors:

- Avoid smoky environments and if you are a smoker, you may wish consider seeking stop smoking advice.
- Avoid using eye make-up which can block glands that lubricate your eyes.
- Limit contact lens use to shorter periods, especially if they cause irritation.
- Keep your eyes protected from wind, dust, and aerosols.
- Use a humidifier to moisten the surrounding air and avoid too much time in places with air-conditioning.

- If you use a computer for lengthy periods, place your monitor at or below eye level, avoid staring at the screen, and take frequent breaks.
- Try to have a healthy balanced diet, with flax seed as well as foods containing omega 3 and 6 fatty acids such as oily fish, nuts, seeds, eggs, green leafy vegetables, etc. Drink plenty of fluids to keep hydrated.

Dry Eye Treatments

Treatments for dry eyes are called artificial tears, tear replacement and “ocular lubricants” – they usually come in the form of eye drops or gels. If you still have dry eyes after trying the self-help methods above, you can try any of the treatments listed in the table below.

You can buy these from your community pharmacy or at the supermarket. Your pharmacist can advise you on which type of eye product is best for you. Finding an effective treatment can vary between people. If one does not work, then others can be tried until you find the right one for you. An effective trial of one product would be for at least 6 to 8 weeks before you should seek an alternative treatment.

Important: If you are advised to purchase treatments to relieve the symptoms of dry eye, it is important that you use these as directed and as regularly as recommended for them to be effective. To manage your symptoms, you will need to embed this self-care routine into daily life. Often not using the products regularly enough or not doing the heat/cleanse/massage because they are complicated or too time consuming can result in a worsening of the problem.

For more information on understanding dry eye and help managing your symptoms, see the following leaflet from the Royal College of Ophthalmologists https://www.rcophth.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Understanding-Dry-Eye_2017.pdf. Leaflet on blepharitis from Moorfield Eye Hospital <https://www.moorfields.nhs.uk/sites/default/files/Blepharitis.pdf> and a video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oHODzr9I3MA> showing eye lid hygiene techniques.

Examples of products you can buy (more are available – ask your pharmacist):

Type	Brand (examples)	Brands suitable for use with contact lenses	Directions for use
Hypromellose eye drops 0.3% or 0.5%	Generic (0.3%) Available as 0.3% & 0.5% versions: AccuLose® AaproMel®	Evolve® Hypromellose 0.3% preservative free Available as 0.3% & 0.5% versions: Teardew®	Use every hour at first then reduce to four times a day as your eyes improve.
Carbomer 0.2% eye gel	Clinitas® Lumecare Carbomer	Evolve® Carbomer 980 (PF) phosphate and buffer free	Can be used up to 3 times a day and at night before bed. Can be used before bed with other drops in the daytime if preferred.

Polyvinyl alcohol 1.4% eye drops	Sno Tears®	Refresh® Ophthalmic single dose unit (PF)	Use up to 6 times a day.
Sodium hyaluronate 0.2% eye drops	Blink® Intensive Tears	Blink® Intensive Tears	Use up to 6 times a day.
Hydroxypropyl guar eye drops	Systane®		Use up to 6 times a day.
Carmellose 1% preservative free eye drops	Celluvisc®	Eyeaze®	Use up to 6 times a day.
*Paraffin based ointments	Xailin® Night		For bedtime use as may cause blurred vision. Can use with other drops in the daytime. *Paraffin based ointments are flammable and care should be taken to avoid burns e.g., smoking, close contact with naked flames etc.

How to use eye drops/gels:

- Wash your hands before applying treatment.
- Tilt your head back (or lie down) and pull the lower eyelid out to form a pocket.
- For eye drops – put one drop into the pocket. Only one drop is needed; any more will spill out from the eye.
- For eye gels – apply a thin line of gel along the inside of the lower eyelid. Close your eyes for a moment then blink to spread the gel.
- Repeat the process for the other eye.
- Don't rub your eyes when using eye drops or gels.
- Don't touch the eye with the nozzle of the bottle/tube.