

Staffordshire Eye Clinic

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Dry Eyes

Tears are needed to keep the front of the eye (the cornea) moist and healthy. 'Dry eyes' are caused by a reduction in either the quantity or quality of tears. Poor quality tears do not wet the front of the eye properly (although you may still be able to cry). This problem commonly affects people in the middle years upwards, and women more commonly than men.

Signs and symptoms

- Gritty feeling in your eyes
- Dry feeling
- Burning sensation
- Itching
- Redness of the white part of your eye
- In windy conditions eyes seem to water to compensate for lack of good tears

Treatment

- **Avoid situations that dry the eyes**
Excessive central heating with no extra humidity and car heaters directed on the windscreen both worsen irritation. Long periods of intense concentration reduce the tendency to blink unless a conscious effort is made. If you use a VDU it is sensible to take a break for a few minutes every hour.
- **Blepharitis**
If you have been told you have this condition it will be important to follow the management advice you have been given (see separate advice sheet).
- **Lubricants**
Hypromellose is the commonest tear substitute, but will only be effective in aqueous (water) deficiency. Frequently the other components of the tear film (lipid and mucin) are affected and require different tear substitutes. It is reasonable to try a variety of drops bought over the counter and then stick with the one that suits best.

Other supplements worth trying include polyvinyl alcohol (eg. Snotears), carbomer (eg Viscotears), HP Guar (Systane), Carmellose (Celluvisc),

hyaluronate (eg. Hyabak). Applying an ointment at night (Lacrilube) can be helpful.

If you require frequent eye drops (more than four times per day) it is best to use a preservative free preparation (eg. Celluvisc, Hyabak or Viscotears single dose).

You should try different eye drops to see which suits best. I suggest you try each drop for a couple of weeks and keep a diary card so that you know which eye drop suited best. You should buy the trial drops over the counter through a pharmacist. If you find a tear supplement that suits well your GP may be able to give you it (or a near substitute) on your prescription.

- **Lacrimal punctal plugs**

These plugs block the drainage of tears and help some people with dry eyes. These plugs can be removed if required.