

# Staffordshire Eye Clinic

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## Treatment for blepharitis

Blepharitis is a common inflammatory condition of the eyelids. Small debris and crusts collect in the glands and lashes that line the eyelids. These debris cause chronic irritation with burning, itching and occasionally sensitivity to light. Although it is basically a skin condition it may also cause inflamed glandular cysts (chalazion), infected eye lashes (styes) or affect the eyeball itself.

There is no one-off cure as the inflammation tends to recur if you do not keep up with treatment. However, with regular treatment, symptoms can usually be eased and then kept to a minimum. The main treatment is regular eyelid hygiene. Other treatments that may be needed include antibiotics, and treatment of associated conditions.

### 1. Warmth

The purpose of warmth is to soften any crusts attached to the eyelids. Warmth also helps to 'unplug' blocked glands and allow the oily secretions to flow more readily. Warmth should be applied to the eyelids for about five minutes.

The traditional method is to gently press on the eyelids with a flannel (facecloth) soaked in very warm water for 5 minutes. When the flannel cools, keep re-warming it in the warm water.

A popular alternative is to use a specially designed heat bag which you place over your eyes for about five minutes. For example, the EyeBag™ which you can buy online. To get the heat bags hot you place them in a microwave for a short time. The advantage of a heat bag over a hot flannel is that the heat is retained longer and so it keeps a constant warmth over the eyes. You can simply lie down and relax for five minutes with the bag placed over your eyes.

### 2. Massage

Massage the eyelids immediately after applying the warmth. Massaging helps to push out the oily fluid from the tiny meibomian glands. To massage the eyelids-

- Start with the upper lid. Put the index or middle finger pad (fingertip) in the corner of the eye next to the nose, just resting on the eyelid above the lashes. Then sweep the finger gently but firmly along the eyelid to the outer end.
- Repeat this with the lower lid, placing the pad of the finger just below the lashes in the corner of the eye and sweeping outwards towards the temple.
- Repeat this sweeping massage action 5 to 10 times over about 30 seconds immediately following the warming.

- Massaging should neither be too gentle nor too firm. It should be relatively comfortable and you should not press hard enough to actually hurt your eyeball under the closed lids. Always massage with the eyes shut.

### **3. Clean**

After warmth and massage, clean the eyelids:

- The traditional way is to use a cotton wool bud that has been dipped in diluted baby shampoo. Just add a few drops of baby shampoo to an egg cup of warm water so that the ratio of water to shampoo is about 10:1. In particular, try to clean off any crusts at the base of the eyelids. After cleaning the eyelids with the cotton wool bud, wash off the shampoo from the eyelids with a flannel or cloth.
- Some people recommend using special eyelid scrubs that you can buy at some opticians / optometrists.

If you are prone to blepharitis it is best to think of this as part of your daily routine - just like brushing your teeth. This is the best way to keep symptoms away, or to a minimum.

### ***A note about antibiotic treatments***

*Antibiotic eye ointment or drops may be advised for a while if an eyelid becomes infected. If you are prescribed ointment, place it on the edge of the eyelid (not the eye) after cleaning the eyelid in the way described above. Antibiotic tablets are also commonly used for troublesome infected eyelids. Note: a three month course of antibiotics may be used in the treatment of blepharitis.*