

WHAT IS DRY EYE?



Our eyes need tears to stay healthy and comfortable. If your eyes do not produce enough tears, it is called dry eye. Dry eye is also when your eyes do not make the right type of tears or tear film.

WHAT CAUSES DRY EYE?

People tend to make fewer tears as they get older due to hormonal changes. Both men and women can get dry eye. However, it is more common in women—especially those who have gone through menopause.

HERE ARE SOME OTHER CAUSES OF DRY EYE

- Certain diseases, such as rheumatoid arthritis, Sjögren's syndrome, thyroid disease, and lupus
- Blepharitis (when eyelids are swollen or red)
- Entropion (when eyelids turn in); ectropion (eyelids turn outward)
- Being in smoke, wind, or a very dry climate
- Looking at a computer screen for a long time, reading, and other activities that reduce blinking
- Using contact lenses for a long time
- Having refractive eye surgery, such as LASIK
- Taking certain medicines, such as:
 - o Diuretics (water pills) for high blood pressure
 - o Beta-blockers, for heart problems or high blood pressure
 - o Allergy and cold medicines (antihistamines)
 - o Sleeping pills
 - o Anxiety and antidepressant medicines
 - o Heartburn medicines

Tell your ophthalmologist about all the prescription and non-prescription medicines you take.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Here are some of the symptoms of dry eye.

- You feel like your eyes are stinging and burning.
- Blurred vision, especially when reading
- There is a scratchy or gritty feeling like something is in your eye.
- There are strings of mucus in or around your eyes.
- Your eyes are red or irritated. This is especially true when you are in the wind or near cigarette smoke.

- It is painful to wear contact lenses.
- You have lots of tears in your eyes.

Having a lot of tears in your eyes with dry eye might sound odd. But your eyes make more tears when they are irritated by dry eye.

HOW IS DRY EYE DIAGNOSED?

Your ophthalmologist will begin with an eye exam. They will look at your eyelids and the surface of the eye. They will also check how you blink.

There are many different tests that help diagnose dry eyes. Your ophthalmologist may do a test that measures the quality or the thickness of your tears. They may also measure how quickly you produce tears.

WHAT ARE THE TREATMENTS?

Treating dry eye by adding tears

Your ophthalmologist might tell you to use artificial tears. These are eye drops that are like your own tears. You can use artificial tears as often as you need to. You can buy artificial tears without a prescription. There are many brands. Try a few until you find a brand that works best for you.

If you use artificial tears more than six times a day or are allergic to preservatives, you should use preservative-free tears. This is because the tears with preservatives may start to irritate your eyes.

Stop dry eye by saving tears

Your ophthalmologist may suggest blocking your tear ducts. This makes your natural tears stay in your eyes longer. Tiny silicone or gel plugs (called punctal plugs) may be inserted in your tear ducts. These plugs can be removed later as needed. Your ophthalmologist could also recommend surgery that permanently closes your tear ducts.

Stop dry eye by increasing your tears

Your ophthalmologist might have you use a prescription eye drop medication. This helps your eyes make more of their own tears.

Treating dry eye culprits

If your eyes are irritated, your ophthalmologist can treat those problems. They may recommend:

- Prescription eye drops or ointments
- Warm compresses on the eyes
- Massaging your eyelids
- Certain eyelid cleaners