

Blepharitis

Blepharitis is a common condition that causes inflammation of the eyelids

How you see the world

If you have blepharitis your eyesight is rarely affected, but the condition could be uncomfortable and persistent and prevent you from doing some daily activities.

Symptoms you might have can include:

- red, greasy and sore eyelids
- thickened and swollen eyelids
- tiny flakes or crusts that look like dandruff at the bottom of the eyelashes
- a feeling that there is something in your eye
- itchy, dry or burning eyes
- sensitivity to light
- blurred vision
- eyelashes growing inwards
- occasional loss of eyelashes and scarring of the eyelids

How the world sees you

If you have blepharitis, you might have red, puffy or crusty eyelids and sometimes red eyes.

Why did I get it?

The exact cause of blepharitis is not known, but people who have skin conditions seem to get it more.

What causes it?

Your eyelids contain tiny glands that make oil which mixes with tears to keep your eyes moist and comfortable. If these glands become blocked, it prevents them from keeping your eyes properly lubricated. This can make your eyes feel sore or gritty.

Is it common?

Blepharitis is a common eye disorder throughout the world. It affects people of all ages.

There are two types of blepharitis:

- **Anterior blepharitis** affects the front of your eyelid, where your eyelashes are attached. Anterior blepharitis is caused by a sensitivity to a substance produced by bacteria (staphylococcus) normally found on the skin. Some people are sensitive to this substance (bacterial toxin), which leads to inflammation
- **Posterior blepharitis** affects your inner eyelid (the moist part that makes contact with your eye), and is caused by problems with the oil glands in this part of your eyelid.

How can the doctor tell? The appearance of inflamed eyelid edges and flakes on the lashes is typical of blepharitis. An examination of the eyelids and eyelashes is usually enough to diagnose blepharitis. A slit lamp microscope is used for a more detailed examination.

Getting it sorted

If you have blepharitis, it can come back at any time, although the severity can vary.

Good eye care is essential to stop the condition occurring again, even when the symptoms are not there. The steps below, called “lid hygiene”, ease the symptoms:

- Warm compress: Boil some water and let it cool for a while. Soak cotton wool or a clean flannel in the warm (but not boiling) water and gently press onto your closed eyelids for two-three minutes at a time.
- Massage your eyelids by gently rolling your first finger over them in a circular motion. This helps to push out the oil from the tiny eyelid glands.
- Use a cotton bud to gently clean the edge of your lower lid.
- Pull the top lid away from your eyeball while looking in a mirror, and clean the edge gently.

A few drops of baby shampoo, or ¼ teaspoon baking powder, in half a cup of water make good cleaning solutions, but always squeeze out the cotton bud before use. Wipe the eyes with clean water afterwards. Repeat this routine once or twice every day to prevent further flare-ups.

Factoids

- Blepharitis does not usually affect vision or damage the eye
- Blepharitis is treated by careful cleaning of the eyelids

In some cases, your doctor will prescribe an antibiotic ointment or eye drops. If you are asked to use these, follow the steps below:

- Lie down, or lean the head back, and look up
- Use a clean finger to gently pull down your lower eyelid to create a pocket
- If you are using eye drops, gently squeeze them into the pocket you have created, not directly onto your eye
- If you are using ointment, apply a small strip into the pocket
- Blink to spread the medication over your eye

Occasionally, antibiotics by mouth or steroid eye drops will be prescribed.

When the going gets tough: lid cysts

Sometimes a chalazion (lid cyst) can grow, which is an enlargement of an oil gland and has similar symptoms to a sty. After a few days, the symptoms disappear, leaving a round, painless swelling sometimes with discolouration underneath the eyelid. Most disappear within a few months without treatment. To help the cyst to go, warm compresses can be used (see above).

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Monday to Friday 09.00 to 16.30 for further information and advice.