

Dry eye

Information

Almost everyone has experienced a feeling of dry eye at some time. Some people have very mild dry eye, which causes only temporary irritation. Dry eye can also be a long-term condition associated with great discomfort or pain, and can affect your vision. Dry eye is very common but people who experience this condition should not think they just have to live with it. Due to improvements in diagnosis and treatment of dry eye, almost all dry eye patients can experience relief of their symptoms.

What is dry eye?

Dry eye starts with a reduction in the quality or quantity of tears. Tear film comprises three layers that work together to keep your eyes moist and protected. The top oily layer helps to prevent evaporation of tears. The middle, watery layer is the thickest layer and the sticky bottom layer helps the tear film to adhere to the eye. If anything upsets the tear film it can become unstable and evaporate. This results in dryness and inflammation of the cornea (front of the eye).

Common symptoms of dry eye:

- > Sore eyes
- > Itchy eyes
- > Blurred vision
- > Watery eyes
- > Red eyes

What causes dry eye?

A number of external and internal factors may contribute to dry eye.

External factors

Dry or windy environments can contribute to dry eye, as well as prolonged concentration when reading or using a computer. Dry eye is also one of the most common side-effects of contact lens wear and refractive laser surgery.

Internal factors

Ageing and hormonal changes including menopause can decrease the amount and quality of tears produced. Certain medications and autoimmune conditions may also result in changes to the tear film and tear production. Blepharitis is a common eye condition that affects the eyelids, resulting in tear film instability.

How is dry eye diagnosed?

An optometrist is the best person to diagnose dry eye. Your optometrist will conduct tests that investigate tear production and tear evaporation, and examine the integrity of your tear film. They may also instil special dyes into the eye that reveal areas of dryness or irritation.

Prevention and treatment

How is dry eye treated?

Treatment depends on the type and severity of the condition. Treatment can include ocular lubricants to relieve the symptoms of dry eye. Your optometrist may also prescribe eye-drops or recommend omega-3 supplements to help reduce inflammation of the cornea. Tiny plugs can also be inserted into the tear ducts to increase the amount of tears at the eye surface.

What can I do to prevent dry eye symptoms?

- > Drink plenty of water
- > Avoid excessive heating / cooling environments
- > Wear wrap-around sunglasses when outdoors
- > Take frequent breaks when using the computer or reading
- > Make an effort to blink more often
- > Talk to your optometrist about taking omega-3 supplements

For more information and help to select the treatments that meet all your eye care and lifestyle needs, ask your optometrist or visit goodvisionforlife.com.au

Your optometrist

