

## Let's take a closer look

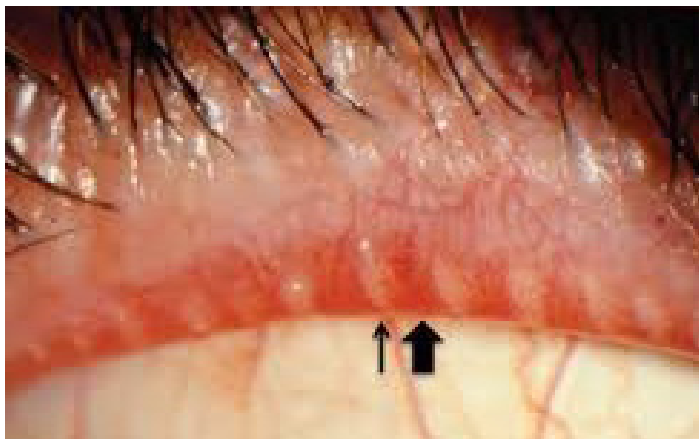
Put simply, 'dry eye' describes when there is an inadequate and inconsistent tear layer on the surface of our eye. In addition to providing a lubrication for the opening and closing of our lids over our eyes, our 'tear film' provides a protective layer to stop our eyes from drying out and infection from entering. Dry eye tends to persist for a long time, constantly reoccurring and usually gets worse if not treated. If left untreated it can cause permanent damage to the surface of our eye and also affect the outcome of cataract or laser refractive surgery.

### Tears are made up of three main ingredients:

- > An oily ("lipid") component – increases lubrication and reduces evaporation
- > A watery ("aqueous") component – keeps the surface of the eye moist
- > A mucus-like ("mucin") component – helps stick and spread the tears across the surface of the eye

### Meibomian glands

The major components of the tear film are produced in the Meibomian glands (see below) and the Lacrimal gland (which feeds the tear ducts that we are familiar with when we cry). When one or both of these fail to work properly, we can suffer from "dry eye".



### What dry eye can look like

A patient with dry eye will often look like their eyes are sore (red, watery and with crustiness on the lids). They may feel like there is grit in their eye, or they may experience blurry vision, tired eyes and sensitivity to light.



### Common symptoms and who is more likely to suffer from dry eye

There are multiple factors that contribute to the likelihood and severity of dry eye, most of which can be managed well with advice from the optometrist.

- > Indoor environments (air conditioning and long hours in front of a computer screen)
- > Outdoor factors (dust, UV, pollen)
- > General health (including our diet, smoking, diabetes, lupus, thyroid conditions & rheumatoid arthritis)
- > Medications (including antidepressants, contraceptives, blood pressure medication, antihistamines)
- > Contact lens wear
- > Repetitive exposure to fumes and chemicals
- > Eye injuries and lid problems
- > Age – as we get older we produce less, lower quality tears
- > Hormonal effects – particularly women going through menopause

## What can we do about it?

Whilst over-the-counter eye drops from our local pharmacy can go a long way to alleviate the discomfort in the short-term, it's important that the optometrist takes a closer look and diagnoses the underlying cause. This will determine the best course of action. The optometrist may prescribe specific eye drops tailored to our symptoms, or they may clear blocked glands.

Alternatively they may provide tips on what to do at home or at work to prevent or limit the problem, such as wearing eye protection or taking dietary supplements.