

# Eye and Dry

## Dry Eye syndrome



THE COLLEGE  
OF OPTOMETRISTS

**Dry eye syndrome** is a condition where the eyes do not make enough tears, or tears evaporate too quickly. Studies have suggested that between 17-30% of people experience dry eye syndrome at some point during their life\*, although it is most likely to affect people who are over the age of 60 and the condition is more common among women than men.

The symptoms of dry eye syndrome can be mild or severe, and can include itchiness or scratchiness around your eyes, as well as blurred vision. The condition is normally not serious; however, there are some rare cases where severe untreated dry eye syndrome has led to scarring of the eye's surface.

There are a number of causes of dry eye. It mostly occurs as a part of the natural ageing process but can also be caused by problems with blinking or problems with the glands that produce the tears. Additionally, some drugs can cause dry eye, for example antihistamines and oral contraceptives.

Mild to moderate cases of dry eye syndrome can usually be successfully treated with **eye drops, gels and ointments** that contain 'tear substitutes', a liquid that is designed to mimic the properties of tears. These eye drops are available from a pharmacy without prescription.

For more severe cases, punctum plugs are an option. Small, silicone plugs are inserted into the tear ducts to prevent tears from draining away, keeping the eye lubricated for longer.

Dr Susan Blakeney, Optometric Advisor to The College of Optometrists, says: "Dry Eye is an uncomfortable condition which can be exacerbated by a number of factors, such as air conditioning, central heating, windy weather and dry environments. While there is no known 'cure' for the syndrome, there are a number of things you can do yourself which may help reduce the symptoms of dry eye."

**Dr Blakeney recommends the following hints and tips to help minimise the discomfort caused by dry eyes:**

- **Lower the temperature in rooms**, since high temperatures make the tears evaporate more quickly. Central heating can make the air quite dry so sometimes humidifiers can help by moistening the air.
- **Blink more in front of the computer** - many people find that their dry eye gets worse during tasks such as reading or computer work. This is usually because we unconsciously blink less when we are doing anything that needs lots of visual attention.
- **Make sure that your computer workstation is positioned correctly to minimise eye strain** - your monitor should be at, or just below eye level.
- **Incorporate oily fish into your diet** - salmon is a good source of omega-3 fatty acids, which may

reduce your risk for dry eyes. Sardine, herring and cod liver oils are even better, or try a supplement.

- **Protect your eyes from wind and hot air** - wearing a pair of wraparound glasses will provide good protection.
- **Stopping, or avoiding, smoking** can help to reduce irritation to your eyes.
- **Use a humidifier at work and at home** - this will help moisten the surrounding air. If you cannot afford a humidifier, lightly spraying your curtains with water several times a day can help keep the air moist. Opening windows for a few minutes on cold days, and longer in the spring and summer, will also help to keep the air moist and prevent the build-up of mould.
- **Visit your optometrist** if you are concerned about the health of your eyes. The optometrist is the eye health specialist on the high street and will be able to check if your symptoms are not caused by anything else.

\*Source - [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

#### **About The College of Optometrists:**

- The College of Optometrists is the Professional, Scientific and Examining Body for Optometry in the UK, working for the public benefit. Supporting its Members in all aspects of professional development, the College provides pre-registration training and assessment, continuous professional development opportunities, and advice and guidance on professional conduct and standards, enabling our Members to serve their patients well and contribute to the wellbeing of local communities.
- Previously known as ophthalmic opticians, optometrists are trained professionals who examine eyes, test sight, give advice on visual problems, and prescribe and dispense spectacles or contact lenses. They also recommend other treatments or visual aids where appropriate. Optometrists are trained to recognise eye diseases, referring such cases as necessary, and can also use or supply various eye drugs.
- Optometrists study at university for at least three years normally and participate in a full year of training and supervision, called the pre-registration year, before qualifying. Once qualified, they have the opportunity to develop their interests in specialist aspects of practice such as contact lenses, treating eye diseases, low vision, children's vision and sports vision.
- All optometrists practising in the UK must be registered with the General Optical Council, the profession's regulatory body, and are listed in the Opticians Register. The letters FCOptom or MCOptom after an optometrist's name means that he or she is a fellow or member of the College of Optometrists. The letters DipCLP after an optometrist's name means that he or she has undertaken an additional post graduate qualification in contact lens practice.
- There are currently over 11,000 registered optometrists in the UK.