

PATIENT INFORMATION SHEET: DRY EYE (IN ADULTS)

What is Dry Eye?

Dry eye occurs when there is a problem with the tears that normally keep the eye moist. It affects both eyes and most cases are mild to moderate.

Symptoms of Dry Eye

- gritty, sandy, aching or burning eyes
- sensation of something in your eye
- persistent irritation
- intermittent blurred vision
- watery eyes— contrary to what you might expect, dry eye can actually cause your eyes to produce too many tears
- contact lens intolerance especially towards the end of the day
- sensitivity to light

Causes of Dry Eye

- **Ageing** — dry eye commonly occurs as we age and affects more women than men.
- **Inflammation of the eyelids**, e.g. blepharitis very common cause – see blepharitis leaflet.
- **Low humidity**, e.g. central heating, air conditioning or air travel
- **Environmental factors** - e.g. windy conditions
- **Screen time** - looking at screens for a long time without a break
- **Contact lens wear**
- **Eyelid problems** that stop the eyelids from closing completely, e.g. Bell's Palsy
- **Previous eye surgery**

- **Certain medical conditions or medicines**

Management of Dry Eye

There are simple changes you can make which may help reduce the evaporation of tears and symptoms of dry eye.

- Eyelid care (leaflets available) to control the inflammation blepharitis.
- Avoid very dry atmospheres - consider the use of a humidifier to moisten the air.
- Wear sunglasses outside to reduce tear evaporation
- Lower the temperature in a room slightly
- If using a computer for long periods, ensure that the monitor is at or below eye level, avoid staring at the screen, and take frequent breaks to close/blink eyes.
- A diet rich in omega 3 fatty acids
- If you wear contact lenses, speak to your optometrist

Using artificial tears

- Artificial tears aim to supplement and replace your natural tears to make the eye more comfortable. They are not a cure.
- If you have severe dry eye, **you should continue your treatment long-term.**
- Artificial tears are available as drops, gels and ointment. A range of products are available to purchase over the counter

Artificial tear drops and gels

- There are several types of artificial tear drops and gels. Occasionally, some people find one type may irritate. Changing to a different preparation may help if the first does not suit.
- Some people develop sensitivity to the preservative used in artificial tears, especially if they are instilled frequently. Ask your pharmacist, optician or GP about preservative free artificial tears.

Contact lens wearers

You should not wear contact lenses whilst using many types of eye drops. Check with your optician or pharmacist which artificial tears are suitable for use with contact lens wear.

When to seek medical advice

See your optician (optometrist) or GP if you have persistent but mild symptoms of dry eye syndrome despite using treatments as advised.

Most optometry practices across Northern Ireland provide a service for patients who develop a sudden eye problem. Further information on the NI PEARS Scheme can be found [here](#)

Contact your optometrist or GP immediately if you have any severe symptoms. If this isn't possible, visit your nearest emergency department.

Contact your optometrist or GP, or visit your nearest emergency department immediately if you have any of the following symptoms, as they could be a sign of a more serious condition:

- extreme sensitivity to light (photophobia)
- very painful or red eyes
- a deterioration in your vision

Further information

The College of Optometrists has a helpful website called 'Look after your eyes' which can be found at this link: <https://lookafteryoureyes.org/>