

Eyelid hygiene care: Crusting, blocked oil glands, blepharitis, stye/chalazion prevention

1-2 times a day for a couple weeks and then a few times a week for maintenance thereafter.

Place a source of continuous heat (not so hot that it will burn you, test on other area of the skin) over your eyes for 5-10 minutes. A clean wash cloth works in most instances, although specialized products, like MediBeads or a fire and ice mask, may be easier and more effective. Other options such as a heating pad or even the warmth from shower water on the face can be useful. This heat will help soften blocked oil glands and loosen crusts on your eyelashes.

Next prepare a cleansing solution by mixing 3 drops of baby shampoo and 3 ounces of warm water. Place the tip of a washcloth or q tip and dip it into the mixture. With your eyes closed, brush the lash area 10-20 times to clean the eyelids. If having difficulty cleaning the eyelashes with the eye closed, gently pull the eyelid away from the eye (up or down) and then clean the lash area only, avoiding the eye. Lastly, gently massage the eyelids by rolling a finger towards the eye lashes to help express oils from the blocked glands. Do this on the upper and lower lid 10 times with the eyes closed. Rinse the eyelids with cool water and gently pat dry. Apply ointment or gel to the eyelashes at bedtime if directed to do so.

Hypochlor Gel or Spray: As an adjunct or replacement for the baby shampoo cleansing solution above

Very effective in treating bacteria, toxins, and biofilms which obstruct oil glands near the lashes and can be used as a stand alone treatment instead of traditional lid cleaning. The lids are cleansed twice a day for 2-4 weeks as instructed on the package and then at maintenance intervals thereafter. Use after make-up removal. Completely non-toxic to the eye, skin, clothing, and in fact has ingredients to soothe the eyelid and surrounding skin.

Artificial tears

Use as directed by the physician but typically 2-4 times a day even when asymptomatic and as needed (especially before eye intensive tasks). Preservative free tears may be more comfortable and can be used as many times a day as one wishes. Those using preserved artificial tears more than 4-6 times a day may find greater relief with preservative free drops. There are many different brands and types of artificial tears, including formulations that contain more than just the liquid portion of tears, such as certain proteins and/or oils/lipids. The efficacy of each varies from person to person, and will take some trial and error until you find a drop you like. Thicker artificial tears, like gels, can be very helpful and last longer but may transiently blur the vision and should be used with care. The amount of drops needed can be determined once one finds adequate relief from irritation, dryness, tearing, or the like. The drops should be continued indefinitely as stopping will lead to recurrence of symptoms. As a general rule artificial tears are more effective when administered regularly rather than waiting for the eyes to become irritated. A good example is the way in which you might water your lawn, which is watered every day rather than only when turning brown.

Eye symptoms worst in the morning, especially if the eyelids do not close fully, benefit greatly from a night time artificial tear ointment (refresh pm, lacrilube, etc). Apply a pea sized amount into the affected eye(s) just before bedtime.

Omega 3 fatty acids: fish and flaxseed oils orally

According to studies, taking at least 1,000 mg EPA+DHA (650 mg EPA and 350 mg DHA) daily can greatly relieve dry eyes, improve blocked oil glands, and help with blepharitis and inflammation. The effect takes about 3 months of use, and one must continue it indefinitely. Formulations containing 2-3,000mg a day may have greater effect, but can thin the blood. Different formulations may be easier to ingest and have less side effects like gas or bloating. PRN Dry eye Omega is a liquid formulation that has been shown to be well tolerated with fewer side effects, while providing beneficial levels of the above omega fatty acids. Consult and inform your primary care physician if considering taking these supplements.

20/20 rule

Rest the eyes by closing them 20 seconds for every 20 minutes of eye use (especially with reading, computer, and focused work.)

The eyes stop blinking with concentration or focused eye use. This is why children often seem like they do not blink for an hour while watching tv. Though their tears may sustain the ocular surface, with aging, tears lose the ability to compensate for increased eye exposure, making dryness/vision worse, while creating the feeling of tired eyes.

Drink more water, take a break from contacts, and be aware of medication side effects

Stay hydrated, as even mild dehydration can lead not only to dry mouth and decreased urination, but dry eye as well. Be aware that some medications can also cause dry mouth and eyes, like diuretics and antihistamines. Take a break from contact lenses as overuse can fatigue the eyes - the material is foreign to the body, and causes irritation/inflammation.

Environmental modification

Redirect fans or devices that blow air away from the eye. When going outdoors, wearing glasses or other eye protection may offer more comfort as they decrease the stress of air blowing on the eye. Add a humidifier during the winter. Position your computer screen or read below eye level as the eyes will be less wide and exposed to dryness. Controlling any nasal or eye allergies will also help immensely, as inflammation in or around the eye can worsen eye irritation and dryness. Over the counter anti-allergy eye drops, nasal steroid decongestants, and other anti-allergy products can be very effective.

Face, eye, neck, and décolleté skin care

Even mild skin irritation from dryness, rosacea, or dermatitis can affect the eye by creating adjacent inflammation or changing the position of the eyelid. Cerave eye/night/moisturizing creams, Eye Genius, Optic Chyrstal, Cetaphil, SKII, Kiehl's, or similar moisturizers, lotions, and eye creams should be applied at least 2 times a day. When the skin is very cracked and irritated, a hand repair cream can be helpful. Additional skin care including the use of toners, essences, emulsions, serums, masks, and other treatments are highly recommended. Also, always wear a sun screen of at least spf 30 or greater, reapplying as needed, even on cloud days.

Punctal plugs

Temporary or semi-permanent occlusion of the tear drains along the eyelid may be performed in the office to allow tears to persist longer and moisten the eye.

Restasis

An eye drop that increases baseline tear production and decreases inflammation to enhance ocular comfort. After initiating the drop it may take a couple months before improvement is seen.

Tetracyclines: doxycycline/minocycline

These are antibiotic medications that can be used for an anti-inflammatory effect for certain conditions. The dosing typically lasts 3-6 months, followed by a break for a month, and then restarting the medication. Patients can also be tapered over time to the lowest daily/weekly dose needed to keep things under control. The main side effects of these medications are photosensitivity, mild skin discoloration, and stomach upset, although we advise reading the drug insert of all details before starting the medication. Sunscreen should be applied at all times when outside, and many people take a drug holiday during the summer.

Acupuncture

Some purported benefit in some individuals and may be of use in a complementary fashion, as there may be a component of abnormal nerve pain.

Botox

If dry eye is severe enough, forced and involuntary blinking may increase, impairing vision. Low doses of Botox around the eyelids may decrease excess blinking, while improving the retention of tears by slowing its normal drainage.

Tea tree oil

Cleans dandruff/crusting related to Demodex (Mites)

A daily eyelash and eyebrow scrub with 20-50% tea tree oil 3 weeks may help. 20% solutions are available over the counter and work for most. A 50% tea tree scrub solution can be made by diluting 100% tea tree oil with macadamia or walnut oil. Your physician may also have you apply an antibiotic/steroid ointment after scrubbing. Washing the face with tea tree soap and cleaning the hair with tea tree shampoo will have crossover benefits as well if done concurrently. All face products need to be discarded, while sheets and pillows need to be washed on hot and dried on high.