

What is blepharitis?

Blepharitis is a common eye condition that makes your eyelids red, swollen, irritated, and itchy. It can cause crusty dandruff-like flakes on your eyelashes.

Blepharitis can be uncomfortable. But it isn't contagious, and it usually doesn't cause any lasting damage to your eyes.

The main treatment for blepharitis is regularly cleaning your eyelids and keeping them free of crusts. Blepharitis usually doesn't go away completely, but you can take steps to manage your symptoms. Talk to your eye doctor about what's causing your blepharitis and the best ways to manage it.

What are the symptoms of blepharitis?

Common symptoms of blepharitis are:

- Feeling like there's something in your eye
- Burning or stinging eyes
- Watery eyes
- Itchy eyes
- Sensitivity to light
- Red and swollen eyes or eyelids
- Tears that are foamy or have small bubbles in them
- Dry eyes
- Crusty eyelids or eyelashes when you wake up

Blepharitis can also cause more serious problems like:

- Blurry vision
- Eyelashes that fall out
- Eyelashes that grow in the wrong direction
- Swelling of other parts of the eye, like the cornea

Am I at risk for blepharitis?

You're at higher risk for blepharitis if you have:

- Dandruff — flaky patches of skin on your scalp or face
- Rosacea — a skin condition that causes redness and bumps, usually on your face
- Oily skin
- Allergies that affect your eyelashes

What causes blepharitis?

Most of the time, blepharitis happens because you have too much bacteria on your eyelids at the base of your eyelashes. Having bacteria on your skin is normal, but too much bacteria can cause problems. You can also get blepharitis if the oil glands in your eyelids get clogged or irritated.

What are the types of blepharitis?

There are 2 types of blepharitis. You may have 1 type of blepharitis, or you may have both types at the same time.

Anterior blepharitis. Anterior blepharitis affects the outside of your eye, where your eyelashes attach to your eyelid. It usually happens because of bacteria on your skin or dandruff from your scalp or eyebrows. Allergies or mites (tiny parasites) may also cause anterior blepharitis, but this is rare.

Posterior blepharitis. Posterior blepharitis affects the outside of the inner edge of the eyelid — the part that touches your eye. This type of blepharitis happens when the oil glands in your eyelids get clogged. Common skin conditions like rosacea and scalp dandruff can cause posterior blepharitis.

How will my eye doctor check for blepharitis?

Your eye doctor can check for blepharitis by doing a physical eye exam. During the exam, your doctor will take a close look at your eyes, eyelids, and eyelashes. They may use a bright light or a special magnifying tool.

What other health problems can blepharitis cause?

Blepharitis can lead to other eye problems, including:

- **Stye.** A stye is a red, painful bump on the eyelid caused by a blocked oil gland.
- **Chalazion.** A chalazion is a hard, painless lump on the eyelid caused by a blocked oil gland. Often, this happens when you have a stye that doesn't go away. It can make your eyelid swell and turn red. A chalazion will often go away on its own.
- **Dry eye.** Oil and flakes can build up in your tear film (a thin layer of tears across the surface of your eye). This can make your eyes feel dry. Or your eyes may feel watery or teary because your tears aren't working correctly. [Learn more about dry eye.](#)
- **Damage to the cornea.** In severe cases, blepharitis can hurt your cornea (the clear outer layer at the front of your eye). This can happen because of swelling or irritation in your eyelids or eye lashes that grow in the wrong direction.
- **Chronic (long-term) red eye.** Blepharitis can make the white part of your eye look red all the time.

What's the treatment for blepharitis?

The best way to treat blepharitis is to keep your eyelids clean and free of crusts. Use water and a gentle cleanser (like baby shampoo) to clean your eyelids and remove crusts every day.

Steps for cleaning your eyelids when you have blepharitis:

1. Wash your hands with soap and water.
2. Mix warm water with a gentle cleanser, like baby shampoo.
3. Dip a clean, soft cloth or cotton swab in the warm cleanser and water mixture.

4. Press the cloth against your closed eye for a few minutes to loosen crusts. This can also help keep your oil glands from clogging.
5. Gently rub the cloth or cotton swab back and forth, focusing on the area where your eyelashes meet your eyelids.
6. Rinse your eye with clean water.
7. Repeat these steps on your other eye using a new cloth or cotton swab.

There are other treatment options that may help you manage blepharitis. Ask your eye doctor if any of these options are right for you:

- **Eye drops.** Your doctor may prescribe steroid eye drops to control redness, swelling, and irritation. Your doctor may also recommend a type of eye drops called artificial tears. You can get these eye drops without a prescription.
- **Medicines that fight infection.** If your blepharitis is caused by bacteria, your doctor may prescribe antibiotic eye drops, ointments, or pills.
- **Treating other health problems.** If another health problem like rosacea or dandruff is causing your blepharitis, treating that condition will help.

Blepharitis usually doesn't go away completely. You'll need to follow a routine for cleaning your eyelids for the rest of your life to keep it under control.

What is blepharospasm?

Blepharospasm (also called benign essential blepharospasm) is blinking or other eyelid movements, like twitching, that you can't control.

Eyelid twitching usually goes away on its own. But people with benign essential blepharospasm can develop severe and chronic (long-term) eyelid twitching.

What are the symptoms of blepharospasm?

Blepharospasm usually starts with small eyelid twitches that happen every once in a while. Over time, the twitching may happen more often and cause your eyes to close completely. That can make it hard to do everyday things, like reading or driving.

Some people also have facial twitches (twitches in other parts of the face).

If my eyelids twitch, do I have blepharospasm?

Not necessarily. Benign essential blepharospasm is rare, and lots of different things can cause eyelid twitching — like stress, dry eye, too much caffeine, and lack of sleep. Most of the time, the twitching goes away on its own.

Sometimes, eyelid twitching can happen as part of other health conditions like Parkinson's disease, Meige syndrome, and Tourette syndrome. And it's a side effect of certain medicines.

Go to your eye doctor if:

- Your eyelids keep twitching for more than a few weeks
- Your eyes close completely when they twitch
- Other parts of your face start to twitch, like the muscles on 1 side of your face

What causes blepharospasm?

Blepharospasm happens when the part of the brain that controls your eyelid muscles stops working correctly. Sometimes blepharospasm runs in families, and women ages 40 to 60 are more likely to develop it. But in most cases, doctors aren't sure what causes it.

How will my eye doctor check for blepharospasm?

Your eye doctor can check for blepharospasm as part of a comprehensive eye exam. They'll also ask you about your medical history and family medical history.

[Learn what to expect during an eye exam](#)

What's the treatment for blepharospasm?

There's no cure for blepharospasm, but there are treatments that can help with your symptoms.

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Injections. Your eye doctor can inject a medicine called Botox into your eyelid muscles to make them stop twitching. Most people need to get injections every 3 to 4 months.

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Surgery. If injections don't work for you, your doctor may recommend a surgery called myectomy. In a myectomy, a surgeon will remove some of the muscle or nerve tissue from your eyelids to help stop the twitching.

Lifestyle changes like managing your stress, getting enough sleep, and cutting down on food or drinks with caffeine (like coffee, tea, or soda) may also help.

If another condition is causing your eyelids to twitch, treating that condition may stop the twitching. For example, if you have dry eye, your doctor may recommend eye drops or medicine to help your eyes make more tears.

What is the cornea?

The cornea is the clear outer layer at the front of the eye. The cornea helps your eye to focus light so you can see clearly.

[Learn more about the cornea](#)

What are the main types of corneal conditions?

There are several common conditions that affect the cornea.

Injuries. Small abrasions (scratches) on the cornea usually heal on their own. Deeper scratches or other injuries can cause corneal scarring and vision problems.

Allergies. Allergies to pollen can irritate the eyes and cause allergic conjunctivitis (pink eye). This can make your eyes red, itchy, and watery.

[Learn more about pink eye](#)

Keratitis. Keratitis is inflammation (redness and swelling) of the cornea. Infections related to contact lenses are the most common cause of keratitis.

[Learn more about contact lens-related infections](#)

Dry eye. Dry eye happens when your eyes don't make enough tears to stay wet. This can be uncomfortable and may cause vision problems.

[Learn more about dry eye](#)

Corneal dystrophies. Corneal dystrophies cause cloudy vision when material builds up on the cornea. These diseases usually run in families.

[Learn more about corneal dystrophies](#)

There are also a number of less common diseases that can affect the cornea — including ocular herpes, Stevens-Johnson Syndrome, iridocorneal endothelial syndrome, and pterygium.

[Learn about other types of corneal disease](#)

When to get help right away

Go to the eye doctor or the emergency room if you have:

- Intense eye pain
- Change in vision
- Blurry vision
- Very red, watery eyes
- An object stuck in your eye
- A serious eye injury or trauma — like getting hit hard in the eye

Am I at risk for corneal conditions?

Some corneal conditions, like corneal dystrophies, run in families. But there are steps you can take to lower your risk of corneal injuries and infections.

To prevent corneal injuries, wear protective eyewear when you:

- Play sports that use a ball or puck, like baseball or hockey
- Do yardwork, like mowing the lawn or using a weedwhacker
- Make repairs, like painting or hammering
- Use machines, like sanders or drills
- Use chemicals, like bleach or pesticides

If you wear contact lenses, always follow the instructions to clean, disinfect, and store your lenses. This can help prevent corneal infections, like keratitis.

[Learn more about contact lenses and how to take care of them](#)

Feel like something's stuck in your eye?

- Try blinking several times
- Try rinsing your eye with clean water or saline (salt) solution
- Try pulling your upper eyelid down over your lower eyelid
- Don't rub your eye — you could scratch your cornea
- If an object is stuck in your eye, don't try to remove it yourself — go to your eye doctor or the emergency room

How will my eye doctor check for corneal conditions?

Eye doctors can check for corneal conditions as part of a comprehensive eye exam. The exam is simple and painless.

[Learn what to expect from a comprehensive dilated eye exam](#)

To check for corneal abrasions (scratches), your eye doctor may use a special type of eye drops called fluorescein dye. The dye makes corneal abrasions easier to see.

What is the treatment for corneal conditions?

Many corneal conditions can be treated with prescription eye drops or pills. If you have advanced corneal disease, you may need a different treatment.

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Laser treatment. To treat some corneal dystrophies and other conditions, doctors can use a type of laser treatment called phototherapeutic keratectomy (PTK) to reshape the cornea, remove scar tissue, and make vision clearer.

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Corneal transplant surgery. If the damage to your cornea can't be repaired, doctors can remove the damaged part and replace it with healthy corneal tissue from a donor.

[Learn more about corneal transplants](#)

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Artificial cornea. As an alternative to corneal transplant, doctors can replace a damaged cornea with an artificial cornea, called a keratoprosthesis (KPro).

Did you know?

- Corneal transplants are the most common type of transplant surgery

- In 2014, more than 47,000 people in the United States got a corneal transplant

What is the latest research on corneal conditions?

Scientists are studying what causes corneal disease and how we can find it earlier and treat it better. NEI also funds research on new treatment options.

What is dry eye?

Dry eye happens when your eyes don't make enough tears to stay wet, or when your tears don't work correctly. This can make your eyes feel uncomfortable, and in some cases it can also cause vision problems.

Dry eye is common — it affects millions of Americans every year. The good news is that if you have dry eye, there are lots of things you can do to keep your eyes healthy and stay comfortable.

What are the symptoms of dry eye?

Dry eye can cause:

- A scratchy feeling, like there's something in your eye
- Stinging or burning feelings in your eye
- Red eyes
- Sensitivity to light
- Blurry vision

Am I at risk for dry eye?

Anyone can get dry eye, but you might be more likely to have dry eye if you:

- Are age 50 or older
- Are female
- Wear contact lenses
- Don't get enough vitamin A (found in foods like carrots, broccoli, and liver) or omega-3 fatty acids (found in fish, walnuts, and vegetable oils)
- Have certain autoimmune conditions, like lupus or Sjögren syndrome

What causes dry eye?

Normally, glands above your eyes make tears that keep your eyes wet. Dry eye happens when your tears don't do their job. This could mean:

- Your glands don't make enough tears to keep your eyes wet
- Your tears dry up too fast
- Your tears just don't work well enough to keep your eyes wet

[Learn more about the causes of dry eye](#)

How will my eye doctor check for dry eye?

Your doctor can check for dry eye as part of a comprehensive dilated eye exam. The exam is simple and painless — your doctor will give you some eye drops to dilate (widen) your pupil and then check your eyes for dry eye and other eye problems.

[Learn what to expect from a comprehensive dilated eye exam](#)

Be sure to tell your doctor if you think you might have dry eye. To find out if you have dry eye, your doctor might check:

- The amount of tears your eyes make
- How long it takes for your tears to dry up
- The structure of your eyelids

[Learn more about tests for dry eye](#)

Did you know?

- Dry eye is common — nearly 16.4 million Americans have dry eye
- Dry eye can happen if you spend a lot of time looking at your computer, tablet, or smart phone
- If severe dry eye isn't treated, it can sometimes damage your cornea, the clear outer layer at the front of your eye

What's the treatment for dry eye?

Treatment for dry eye usually depends on what's causing your symptoms. There are a few different types of treatment that can ease your symptoms and help keep your eyes healthy.

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Over-the-counter eye drops. The most common treatment for mild dry eye is a type of eye drops called artificial tears. You can get these eye drops without a prescription. There are also over-the-counter moisturizing gels and ointments that may help your eyes feel better.

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Prescription medicines. If your dry eye is more serious, your eye doctor may give you a prescription for medicines called cyclosporine (Restasis) or lifitegrast (Xiidra). These medicines are both types of eye drops that can help your eyes make more tears.

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Lifestyle changes. If something in your life or your environment is causing your dry eye, or making it worse, your doctor may suggest changes to help protect your eyes.

For example, if a medicine you take for another health condition is causing dry eye, your doctor may also suggest that you try a different medicine.

Your eyes may also feel better if you:

- Try to avoid smoke, wind, and air conditioning
- Use a humidifier to keep the air in your home from getting too dry
- Limit screen time and take breaks from staring at screens
- Wear wraparound sunglasses when you're outside
- Drink plenty of water — try for 8 to 10 glasses every day
- Get enough sleep — about 7 to 8 hours a night



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Tear duct plugs. If tears are draining too quickly from your eyes, your doctor may suggest putting special plugs (called punctal plugs) in your tear ducts (small holes in the inner corners of your eyes). These plugs can help keep your tears in your eyes.

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Surgery. In some cases, dry eye can happen because your lower eyelids are too loose, causing tears to drain too quickly out of your eye. If this is the cause of your dry eye, your eye doctor may suggest surgery to fix your eyelids and help your tears stay on your eyes. This treatment is not very common.

Talk over your options with your doctor. If another health condition is causing your dry eye, treating that condition may improve your dry eye symptoms. Even if you have dry eye, there are lots of things you can do to help keep your eyes healthy. Remember these tips:

- Follow your doctor's instructions for using your eye drops (over-the-counter or prescription)
- Tell your doctor if dry eye is getting in the way of everyday activities

What's the latest research on dry eye?

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