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Dry eyes

Many people get dry eyes. It's not usually serious and there are things you can do to help.

Check if you have dry eyes

You may have dry eyes if your eyes are:

- itchy
- sore
- gritty
- red
- blurry
- sensitive to light
- more watery than normal

Causes of dry eyes

You may be more likely to get dry eyes if:

- you're over the age of 50
- you wear contact lenses
- you look at computer screens for a long time without a break
- you spend time in air-conditioned or heated environments
- it's windy, cold, dry or dusty
- you smoke or drink alcohol
- you take certain medicines, for example, some antidepressants or blood pressure drugs
- you have a condition, such as blepharitis, Sjögren's syndrome or lupus

How to treat dry eyes yourself

Do

- ✓ keep your eyes clean
- ✓ take breaks to rest your eyes when using a computer screen
- ✓ make sure your computer screen is at eye level so you do not strain your eyes
- ✓ use a humidifier to stop the air getting dry
- ✓ get plenty of sleep to rest your eyes
- ✓ if you wear contact lenses, take them out and wear glasses to rest your eyes

Don't

- ✗ do not smoke or drink too much alcohol
- ✗ do not spend too long in smoky, dry or dusty places
- ✗ do not spend too long in air-conditioned or heated rooms
- ✗ do not stop taking prescribed medicine without medical advice, even if you think it's causing your symptoms

How to keep your eyes clean

1. Soak a flannel in warm (not hot) water and gently press it on the area around your eyes. This makes the oil produced by the glands around your eyes more runny.
2. Gently massage your eyelids with your finger or a cotton bud. This pushes the oils out of the glands.
3. Clean your eyelids by soaking cotton wool in warm water. Do not use hot water. Gently wipe away any excess oil, crusts, bacteria, dust or grime that might have built up.

How a pharmacist can help

A pharmacist may be able to tell you:

- what you can do to treat dry eyes yourself – such as cleaning and protecting your eyes
- if you can buy anything to help – such as eye drops, gels, ointments or allergy medicines
- if you need to see an optician or GP

See an optician or GP if:

- you still have dry eyes after trying home treatments for a few weeks
- there's any change in the shape of your eyelids

They can check what the cause might be and recommend treatment for it.

If an optician or GP cannot find a cause, they may refer you to an eye specialist (ophthalmologist) for tests.

Ask for an urgent appointment if you have any changes to your vision, such as loss of vision.

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