

Sticky eyes in babies and toddlers

Having yellow or white discharge in the eyes (known as 'sticky eyes') is common in newborns and small babies.

Sticky eyes are caused by narrow or blocked tear ducts. This often happens in newborn babies while their tear ducts are developing.

The tear ducts will usually open up themselves in the first few months of life. This means that your baby's eyes will usually get better on their own.

Tell your GP or public health nurse that your baby gets sticky eyes the next time you see them. They can show you how to massage your baby's tear duct to unblock it.

Contact your GP if:

- the whites of your baby's eyes turn pink or red

This could be a sign of [conjunctivitis](#).

Treatment

You may need to clean your baby's eyes if they've become crusted and your baby has trouble opening them.

1. Wash your hands.
2. Wet a sterile cotton ball with saline solution.
3. Gently wipe your baby's eye from the inside corner to the outside corner. Use a new cotton ball for each wipe.
4. Dry the eye using a different cotton ball, wiping from the inside corner out.
5. Wash your hands.

Important

Do not share your baby's towel with other adults and children in the house.

Your GP may give you a referral to see a specialist if your baby's eye is still sticky after 12 months.

Infection

Sometimes your baby's tear duct can become blocked and they can get an infection.

Bring your baby to your nearest emergency department or call 112 or 999 if

your child has a sticky eye and they:

- are in severe pain
- are crying inconsolably
- are listless or hard to wake
- cannot open their eye because it is so swollen
- are pale, mottled and feel abnormally cold to touch
- have any pauses in their breathing lasting more than 10 seconds
- are grunting or have blue lips
- have a fit or a seizure
- have a rash that does not turn white or disappear when you press on it

Take your baby to the GP if:

- their sticky eye is getting worse
- their eye looks red and sore
- they're rubbing their eyes a lot
- you think they're in pain
- they will not open their eyes
- you think they might have [conjunctivitis](#)

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