

Blepharitis Information Sheet

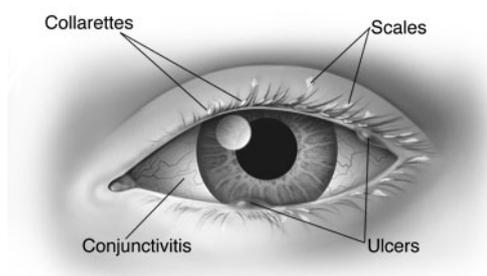
Blepharitis is a common inflammation of the eyelid margins which can affect children and adults. It is due to a low grade infection of the eyelid margin by skin bacteria and can be associated with other skin conditions such as seborrhoeic dermatitis or rosacea. Blepharitis is not normally serious and complications are very rare, especially when the advice regarding treatment is followed. Blepharitis is a chronic condition which can last many years. Although there is no cure, there are a range of treatments that can control the symptoms. The most important one is to establish a daily eye-cleaning routine.

Symptoms of blepharitis

Most people will experience repeated episodes of blepharitis and then have long periods of time where they do not have any symptoms.

Symptoms tend to affect both eyes and include:

- itchy, sore red eyelids,
- crists and debris on the eyelashes,
- a burning, gritty sensation in the eyes,
- sparse eyelash growth.



Causes of blepharitis

There are two types of blepharitis:

- **anterior blepharitis** - this is when the inflammation affects the outside front edge of your eyelids, where your eyelashes are connected, and
- **posterior blepharitis (meibomianitis)** - this is when the inflammation affects the inside front edge of your eyelids, where they come into contact with your eye.

Sometimes, people will experience both types of the condition as the causes of blepharitis are often connected.

Treating blepharitis

Eye hygiene

Developing a regular routine of eye hygiene is essential in the treatment of blepharitis. It is important that you clean your eyelids every night, whether or not you are experiencing any symptoms. You should consider it part of your daily routine, like showering or brushing your teeth. Effective eye hygiene will reduce both the severity and frequency of symptoms.

- Apply a warm compress (cloths or cotton wool warmed with hot water) to your closed eyelids for five to ten minutes. Gently rub the compress over your closed eyelids for two to three minutes, and then repeat. This will help loosen any crusting.
- Dip some cotton buds into a mixture of well diluted baby shampoo (2 drops to an eggcup full of water) or sodium bicarbonate (a teaspoon dissolved in a cup of water). The, using a mirror, gently sweep the cotton bud across your eyelash line on the lid margin, top and bottom.
- Apply antibiotic ointment (if advised) with a clean finger tip to your lid margins after cleaning them



A number of commercial products are also available from your pharmacist. At the beginning of treatment, or if your symptoms are particularly severe, you may need to carry out this routine several times a day. Once symptoms are under control, it should only be necessary to clean your eyes once a day.

You should avoid wearing eye make-up, especially eyeliner. If you feel that you absolutely have to use eye make-up and eyeliner, make sure that it washes off easily and replace your bottles of mascara regularly.

Antibiotic tablets

In some circumstances, you may be given antibiotic tablets (oral antibiotics). Most people respond to the antibiotic well after 2-4 weeks, although the 2-3 month course should be completed. Side effects of oral antibiotics are rare because the dose used is relatively low, and the condition will usually resolve quickly. Side effects include:

- nausea,
- vomiting,
- stomach aches,
- diarrhoea

Complications of blepharitis

Serious complications of blepharitis are rare. The most common problem people face is they are unable to wear contact lenses. It may be necessary for you to use an alternative aid, such as glasses, until your symptoms are under control.

Dry eye syndrome

Dry eye syndrome (also known as keratoconjunctivitis sicca) is a condition where your eyes do not make enough tears, or the tears evaporate too quickly. This can lead to the eyes drying out and becoming inflamed. The symptoms include itchiness, or scratchiness, around your eyes, a gritty feeling in the eyes, and blurred vision. Symptoms dry eye syndrome can normally be helped by using tear substitutes. These eye drops are available from a pharmacist over-the-counter (OTC) without a prescription.

Meibomian Cyst

A Meibomian cyst is swelling that occurs in the eyelids. They can happen when one of your Meibomian oil glands gets inflamed as a result of blepharitis.

Cysts are normally painless, unless they get infected, in which case antibiotics may be needed. Applying a hot compress to the cyst should help bring the cyst down, although they often disappear by themselves. If a cyst persists, it can be removed during a simple surgical procedure that is carried out under local anaesthetic.



Styes

A sty is a painful swelling that develops on the outside of the eyelid. They are caused by a bacterial infection of an eyelash follicle (located at the base of your eyelash).

Mild cases can be treated by applying a hot compress to the area. More serious cases can be treated with antibiotic creams and tablets.