

Blepharitis and lid hygiene

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What is blepharitis?

Blepharitis is inflammation (swelling) of the eyelid margin. This is the part of the eyelid at the base of the eyelashes. The eyelids may become red and crusty and the eyes can become dry due to oil glands in the eyelids becoming blocked. You may notice some dandruff like material on the eyelids.

What causes blepharitis?

The cause of blepharitis is not completely understood. However, it is thought to arise from the normal skin bacteria causing inflammation, or due to the skin being unusually dry or flaky. This leads to blockage of the oil glands from a build-up of flaky skin on the eyelid margin. It can be associated with acne, eczema or dry eyes.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of blepharitis include:

- a gritty feeling in the eyes
- dry eyes
- excessive watering of the eyes
- soreness and discomfort of the eye lids

How is it diagnosed?

Blepharitis can be diagnosed by the following eye care professionals:

- Ophthalmologist
- Optometrist
- Orthoptist
- Nurse

It is diagnosed by looking at the eyelids using a type of microscope called a slit lamp as part of an eye exam.

How is it treated?

Blepharitis cannot be cured. However, with good lid hygiene the symptoms can be reduced and the swelling can be managed.

Lid hygiene

Lid hygiene can be done using the technique below or, alternatively, you may be able to purchase over-the-counter products such as eye cleansing wipes/pads and creams to clean the eyelids, as well as heated pads to use in place of the conventional warm compress.

This can involve two stages:

1. Warm compress. Use a clean flannel or cotton pad.
 - a. Hold the pad under warm/hot running water.
 - b. Squeeze out the excess water.
 - c. Hold the warm flannel/pad against your closed eyelids until it starts to cool down.
 - d. Repeat steps a to c above. You will need to reheat the flannel/pad regularly to keep the eyelids warm.
 - e. The compress should be done for 1 to 2 minutes in total.
2. Lid cleaning. If you have had an eye injection in the last 48 hours or an eye operation in the last 2 weeks, use boiled cooled water.
 - a. Get a clean cotton bud/pad and dip it into the water.
 - b. **Lower eyelid:** with the cotton bud/pad pointed toward your eye, pull the lower eyelid down. Whilst looking up, sweep the cotton bud/pad along your eyelid just behind the eyelashes from your nose to the outer part of your eye.
 - c. **Upper eyelid:** swap the end of the cotton bud/pad and dip this in the sterile water. Look down. Point the cotton bud/pad to your nose and rest this against your upper eyelid behind the eyelashes. Brush side to side whilst lifting the cotton bud upwards, like putting on mascara.
3. Lubricants. You may also be prescribed eye lubricants to help soothe the discomfort and improve the symptoms of dry eye. These should be used regularly throughout the day. It may be more soothing if the drops are refrigerated.
4. Antibiotic eye drops may be used if you have very swollen lids or evidence of a bacterial infection in the eyes.
5. Omega 3 oil and flax seed oil are thought to be beneficial. These can be taken by mouth and may help with dry eye symptoms.

Possible effects of treatment

Improved symptoms.

What is the prognosis or expected outcome of treatment?

It will likely take a couple of weeks of good lid hygiene before you start to notice an improvement in your symptoms.

Are there any possible complications?

If left untreated blepharitis can cause damage to the front surface of the eye (cornea) and can affect your vision.

Untreated severe blepharitis can lead to developing styes and swelling of the oil glands in the eye called meibomian cysts (chalazion).

Follow-up

In most cases, follow-up is not required. In more severe cases, you may be seen 4 to 6 weeks after starting lid hygiene.

Further information

If you have any questions, please ask a member of the eye care team.

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Switchboard: 01271 322577

Useful websites:

blepharistreatment.org.uk/blepharitis-treatment

References

Blepharitis treatment [online] Available at: blepharistreatment.org.uk/blepharitis-treatment [Accessed 17/01/2017]

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Blepharitis. NHS website (2022) [online] Available at: www.nhs.uk/conditions/blepharitis [Accessed 17/01/2017]

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