



Dry eyes

Dry eyes are quite common, especially as we get older. This leaflet describes the problem and explains what can be done to help.

The normal eye

The normal eye has a constant slow flow of tears, which lubricate and wet the front surface of the eye, (the cornea). Some tear fluid is stored in a sack above the eye called the **lacrimal gland** for reflex tearing (automatic crying) when dirt or grit gets into the eye.

Dry eyes

Here the production of tears is much less, although some tears are still stored in the lacrimal gland. The eyes feel sore and gritty, and this gets worse when staring for too long, such as when reading or driving. The discomfort can actually make your eyes weep, even though the problem was caused by a dry eye.

Treatment

- Avoid staring hard when reading or driving.
- Instil a drop of artificial tears as needed.
- Gels for dry eye last longer but may blur your vision.
- Punctal occlusion uses small plugs to seal your tear ducts

Nutrition

Foods or supplements containing omega-3s (essential fatty acids), flaxseed oil, evening primrose oil, star flower oil, fish oil, zinc and vitamin E may lower the risk of suffering from dry eye.

Vitamin E may help to prevent dry eyes. It can be found in unrefined vegetable oils, soya beans, peas, wheat germ, egg yolk, nuts, seeds, meat, and animal fat.

Zinc may help reduce dry eye symptoms. Zinc can be found in shellfish, seeds, red meat, eggs, peas, turnip, cereals, green leafy vegetables, and nuts. Zinc levels in the body are reduced by the consumption of wheat, bran, and alcohol.

Omega-3s may reduce dry eye symptoms. They are found in fish such as salmon, mackerel, herring, trout, and sardines. They are also found in flaxseed oil and evening primrose oil.

If you are taking medicines that reduce your cholesterol such as 'statins', consult your GP before increasing your consumption of omega-3s, because they may increase your blood cholesterol.