

What is Dry Eyes ?

Dry eyes is an ailment that occurs when your eyes are unable to produce the proper amount of tears.

The tears which cover your eyes are a complex mixture of fluids. They contain just the right amount of ingredients to protect your eyes from infection and keep your eyes lubricated.

Tears are produced by a combination of glands located above each eye, and under your eyelids. There are small glands which are responsible for normal "day to day" tears, and other, large glands which only produce tears when your eyes become irritated, or while crying. From the smaller glands, normal tears flow across your eye with each blink, then drain away from your eye via the tear ducts. The tear ducts are located in the inner corner of each eyelid.

Normal tears are composed of three layers: an oily layer, watery layer, and mucous layer. All three layers are necessary to moisten and protect the eye. If any of these tear layers decrease in amount, you will experience dry eyes.

What are the symptoms of Dry Eyes ?

Symptoms of dry eyes include: scratchy, itchy, burning, or stinging eyes. The eyes may appear bloodshot, have a sensitivity to light, and feel gritty or irritated. In some cases, the eyes may actually become watery. This is an attempt by the larger tear glands to compensate for the dryness.

Symptoms of dry eyes may occur constantly, or only during certain times of the day, or even just while you perform specific tasks, such as reading, working on a computer, or riding in an airplane.

Suggestions for Dry Eye Patients

Do not use drops which reduce redness. This type of eye drop is not the proper treatment for dry eyes. In fact, drops that reduce redness can worsen the dry eye condition.

There are many types of artificial tear drops available. You will be given a recommendation for which type of drops to use. Trying several brands may be necessary before you find relief with one brand

For best relief from dry eyes, use the artificial tear drops regularly. Do not wait until your eyes feel uncomfortable.

When instilling drops into your eyes, it is best to put the drop into the outer corner of your eye. The blinking action of your eyelids will sweep the drop across your eye.

A common symptom of dry eyes is occasional excessive tearing! This is an attempt by your eyes to compensate for the dryness.

What causes Dry Eyes ?

The major cause of dry eyes is due to normal age-related changes of the tear glands. As the tear glands age, they produce less and less tears. An otherwise healthy eye will produce about 60% less tears at the age of 60, than it did at the age of 18.

Other possible causes of dry eyes are due to: arthritis, pregnancy, menopause, and Vitamin A deficiency. Certain medications can also cause your tears to decrease, such as antihistamines (allergy medication), antihypertensives (blood pressure medication), tranquilizers, and decongestants (sinus medication). Smoke, smog, dry air, and low humidity are environmental factors which also contribute to dry eyes.

What is the treatment for Dry Eyes ?

There is no cure for dry eyes. Treatment is aimed at relieving the discomfort associated with dry eyes. This is often accomplished with the use of artificial tear drops. The artificial tear drops will supplement your normal tears, and provide you with an adequate amount of moisture to lubricate your eyes. The amount of drops that need to be used will vary, depending upon the severity of the dryness.

If artificial tear drops are poorly tolerated, there are other options. There are treatment methods that attempt to keep your tears from draining away from your eyes. One method involves inserting "plugs" into one tear duct of each eye, which will slow the drainage of tears. Also, the tear ducts can be surgically narrowed or closed, to keep the tears from flowing away from your eyes.