

Eye Health Education

Dry eye syndrome



WHAT IS DRY EYE SYNDROME?

Dry eye syndrome or dry eyes occur when eyes are unable to efficiently produce natural tears. Tears play important roles in ensuring healthy eyes. An adequate and consistent layer of tears on the surface of the eye is vital to keep your eyes healthy, comfortable and seeing well. Tears keep the eye's surface moist and wash away dust, debris and microorganisms that could damage the cornea and lead to an eye infection.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF DRY EYES?

- Foreign Body Sensation—the feeling that grit or that something is “in” your eye
- Burning sensation
- Itchy eyes
- Aching sensations
- Heavy eyes
- Fatigued eyes
- Sore eyes
- Dryness sensation
- Red eyes
- Photophobia (light sensitivity)
- Blurred vision
- Watery eyes—dryness on the eye's surface sometimes will over-stimulate production of the watery component of your tears as a protective mechanism.

WHAT FACTORS INCREASE THE RISK OF DRY EYES?

- Age—Although dry eye syndrome can occur at any age, it becomes increasingly more common later in life, especially after age 50
- Prolonged computer usage
- Indoor environment—Air conditioning and ceiling fans can decrease indoor humidity and/or hasten tear evaporation
- Outdoor environment—Arid climates and dry or windy conditions.
- Frequent air travel—The air in the cabins of airplanes is extremely dry
- Smoking
- Other Health Conditions—Certain systemic diseases such as diabetes, thyroid-associated diseases, lupus, rheumatoid arthritis and Sjogren's syndrome
- Medications—Many prescription and non-prescription medicines including antihistamines, antidepressants, certain blood pressure medications and birth control pills
- Eyelid problems—Incomplete closure of the eyelids when blinking or sleeping

HOW ARE DRY EYES TREATED?

Depending on the cause and severity of your condition, there are several options available for treating dry eyes. With most cases, dry eyes can be managed successfully, usually resulting in noticeably greater eye comfort, fewer dry eye symptoms, and sometimes sharper vision.

Your doctor might recommend lubricating eye drops or ointments and suggest lifestyle changes that may help to decrease the factors that contribute to dry eyes. Some common changes include:

- Applying daily warm compresses to the eyes
- Environmental changes such as adding a humidifier to your room or home
- Consuming sufficient fluids, for example, drinking at least eight glasses of water daily
- Including fish, soy, and omega-3 fatty acids in your diet
- Blinking more often, especially when using an electronic device

It is important to visit your eye doctor to learn how to treat your specific condition. For more information on caring for your eyes, you can visit Trinidad Eye Hospital's website at www.trinidadeyehospital.org.



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