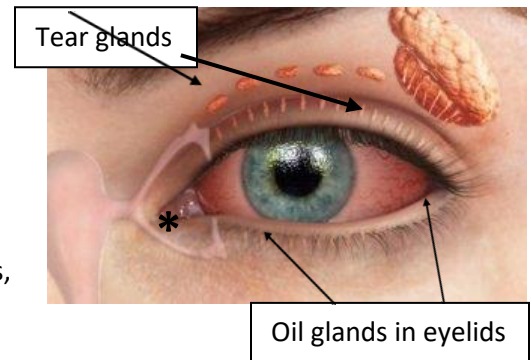


Dry eyes

The surface of the eye is bathed in tears. This is important for the eye to feel normal and the vision to stay clear. The eye can become dry because not enough tears are made, or because they evaporate too quickly. The eye can become inflamed and red when it is dry, which in turn can make the eye drier.

Tear deficiency: Ageing is a very common cause of dryness as the glands that produce tears don't work as well as we get older. Other causes of making less tears include: medications (tablets) for other diseases can affect the tear glands, eye surgery, eye infections, dehydration, and autoimmune diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis and lupus.



Evaporation of tears: Evaporation can occur in dry environments such as air-conditioned offices. If blinking is reduced (people tend to blink less when looking at a computer screen) then more evaporation of tears can also occur.

There is a layer of oil covering the tear layer on the eye. This oil layer comes from a row of oil glands in the eyelids behind the eyelashes. If the eyelids and glands become inflamed (blepharitis) then the amount of oil produced can decrease which will make the tears evaporate quicker.

Treatment

Dry eye cannot be cured, just managed. The aim of treatment is to increase the amount of tears, decrease the evaporation of tears, and decrease inflammation. Your doctor may suggest some of the following:

Make sure you **blink enough** especially when reading or looking at a computer, and make sure you **drink enough water** especially in an airconditioned environment. Also make sure you are using **preservative free** eyedrops.

Lubricating eye drops can be helpful. All can be purchased without a prescription. Ones with a disappearing preservative or no preservative are best and can be used as often as needed. It is a good idea to try a few different ones and see which one feels best for you.

Hot compresses. A hot facecloth applied to the closed eyelids with a little bit of pressure for a few minutes a day helps to melt the oil in the oil glands in the eyelid and get them flowing again.

Omega-3 fatty acid supplements. These can be purchased from a chemist or health food store. They are healthy fats found in abundance in some fish and some seeds such as flaxseeds. They are thought to get the oil glands working better and decrease inflammation.

Punctal plugs. These are little plugs that sit in the ducts in the eyelids where the tears drain into the nose (see the * in picture above). By stopping tears from draining so quickly they can keep the eyes wet for longer.

Steroid eyedrops. These decrease the inflammation which can make dry eyes worse. They should not be used long term.

Antibiotic tablets such as azithromycin and doxycycline can decrease inflammation and make the oil glands work better.

Intense pulsed light (IPL). This is a newer treatment that aims to make the oil glands work better.

Serum eye drops. These are made from your own blood once the red part of the blood has been removed. They can be very effective in people who have failed other treatments.