

# Managing your dry eye

Department of Ophthalmology

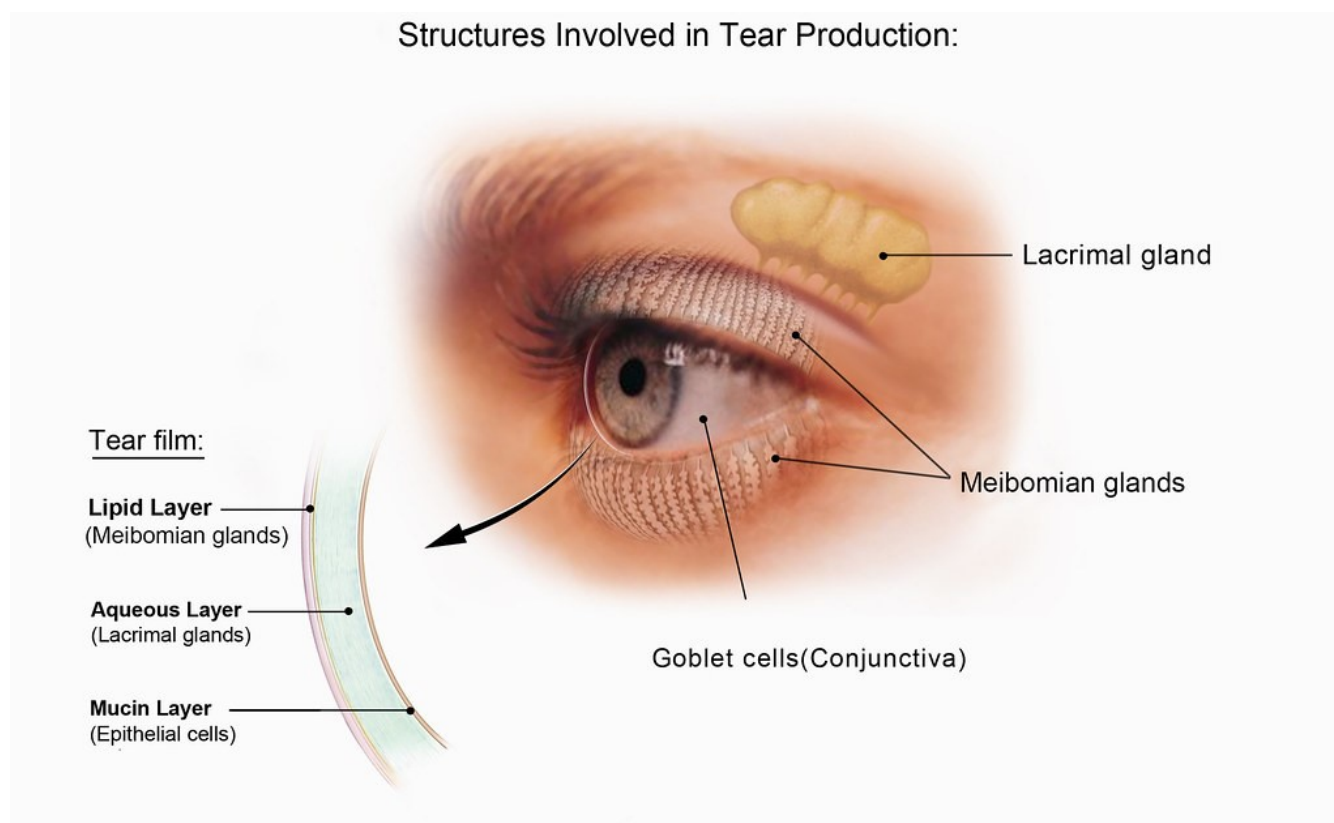
Information for Patients

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## Structures Involved in Tear Production:



## What is dry eye?

Dry eye can be caused by poor quality tears (not enough tears or tears that are not made up of the right chemical make-up), eye surface problems, nerve endings working differently, and conditions that cause redness and swelling (inflammation).

**Health information and support is available at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)  
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### **Reasons for having poor tears are as follows:**

- The eyelid has glands that produce oil which covers the tear film. When the oil is not released the tear film evaporates. The lipid layer (see image on page 1) is the top layer which is released from the eyelids.
- The aqueous layer is produced from the tear ducts. This is the middle layer and is the thickest.
- The mucous layer comes from goblet cells on the surface of the eye; this is the thinnest layer. Glands on the surface of the eye can stop producing mucous.
- The tear film covering the eye is made up of a balance of ingredients. If this normal balance is upset, this will affect the eye surface.
- Age is one of the most common causes of dry eyes.
- Inflammatory conditions can affect how the eye makes tears, and also effect the eye surface.

Inflammatory conditions can contribute to dry eyes. These include conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis, lupus and Sjögren's syndrome. You may need to have these conditions managed along with your dry eyes. You may already have been diagnosed with these conditions and have medication from another clinic to deal with symptoms. The condition will need constant treatment to control symptoms.

### **What are the symptoms of dry eye?**

There are many different symptoms of dry eye, these include:

- itchiness
- redness
- blurry vision
- sore and gritty feeling in the eye
- your eyes are more sensitive to light
- your eyes are watering more than normal

## What is the treatment for dry eye?

The main treatment for dry eye is replacement tears, which need to be used at regular intervals. This replaces the tear film. There are many different eye drops available for this.

### Medication:

There are different types of tear supplements to replace the tear film. The aim is to manage the condition. These include:

- drops
- gel
- ointments

They range from watery and therefore easily tolerated but short-lasting, to thick and oily, which last a long time but may make the eyes feel 'sticky' and blur your vision. There are many types and it may be a case of trying a few in different combinations, to see which suits you. You will be advised on this by your eye doctor, your GP or your optician, according to the cause of your dry eye.

### Punctal plugs:

Punctal plugs can be used to stop the tears draining out of your eye. These can be replaced at intervals, as they can fall out and need replacing.

Tears normally drain out of the eye via tiny tubes (punctum). The punctum are on the lid margin, which is the flat area of the lid behind the lashes.

Punctal plugs sit in the tear ducts and help stop the tears from draining away. This can help by keeping tears on the surface of the eye for longer. This procedure is done at the hospital and is quick and painless.

### Managing eyelid conditions:

Treating eyelid conditions which cause dry eye can help with symptoms.

Treatment involves using heat, massage and cleaning of the eyelid (there is a separate leaflet which explains how to do this).

## Contact lenses:

Some people feel a benefit from wearing contact lenses, as it can help with the discomfort from dry eyes. They are used for a very small group of patients with underlying eye conditions. There is an increased risk of infection by using contact lenses. They need to be changed every month.

Dry eye is a life-long (chronic) condition where you will have good and bad days. There is no cure for this condition. Dry eye can normally be managed by your optician; only severe cases will need to be managed in hospital.

## Contact details

If you have any questions, or you need treatment advise please contact:

**Eye Casualty Department:** 0116 258 6273

Monday to Friday - 8.30am to 4.30pm

Weekends and bank holidays - 8.30am to 12.30pm

Alternatively your optician can advise you about this condition.

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