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Treating inflammation of the eyelid (blepharitis) with lid hygiene

Department of Ophthalmology
Information for Patients

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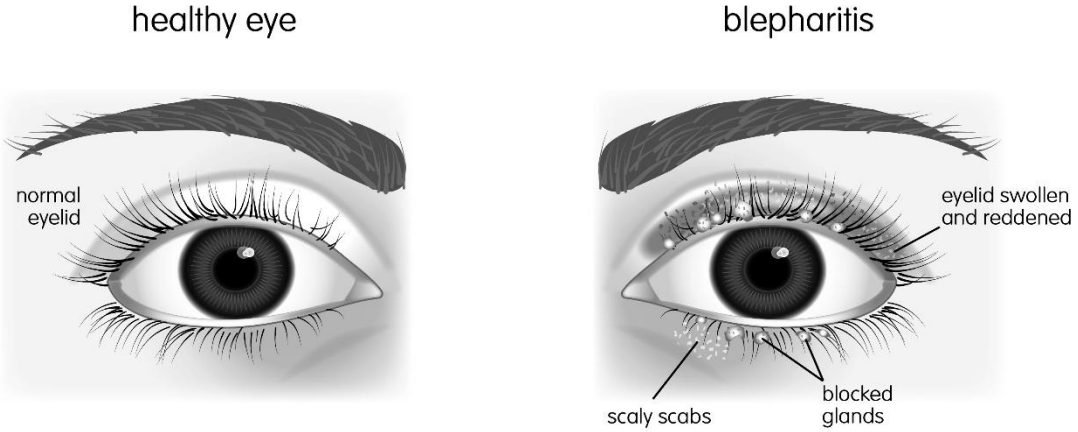
What is blepharitis?

Blepharitis causes red, itchy and swollen rims to eyelids. It often comes and goes, It can affect the upper and lower lids of both eyes. Blepharitis can affect people of all ages.



What causes blepharitis?

There are several types of blepharitis, most of which are linked to skin type. It may be made worse by being in dusty, dry and smoky environments.

Blepharitis is caused by a blockage of oil glands (known as the meibomian glands) in the eyelids. This leads to irritation and swelling of the rims of the eyelid

People with certain skin conditions (for example acne, rosacea) may be more likely to get blepharitis. You may need treatment for many years, perhaps every day to manage this condition.

There are 2 types:

- **Anterior blepharitis** affects the lashes at the front of the eyelid. Oil collects around the base of eyelashes causing redness, flaking and itching.
- **Posterior blepharitis** affects the oil glands inside the lid. The oil becomes thick and solid. This irritates the glands, causing the lid to swell and feel heavy. As the oil cannot get into the eye, the eye can feel dry.

What are the signs and symptoms of blepharitis?

- Crusting around the eyelashes.
- Red, inflamed, swollen eyelids.
- Discomfort, burning, itching or dry feeling in the eyes.
- Watering of the eyes.
- Eyelids that stick together, especially when you wake up after sleeping.

You may not have all these symptoms at the same time, and how bad the symptoms are can change constantly.

How is blepharitis treated and what can I do?

You can reduce the symptoms by soothing the eyelids and clearing out any oil that has been stuck in the glands. You should do this as a daily routine made up of cleansing, warm compresses and massage. These are detailed below. You will be advised which routine to follow, it may be one or both.

Cleaning your eyelashes (for anterior blepharitis):

Hold your lashes with a hot flannel for a minute, then massage the lashes. This will soften the oil stuck on the lashes. Once this has melted, you can clean the lashes by rubbing the lash line with the flannel or cotton pad.

If you wear contact lenses you should only use boiled water that has cooled down.

You must take your contact lenses out before starting your lid hygiene routine. You must never use tap water with contact lenses.

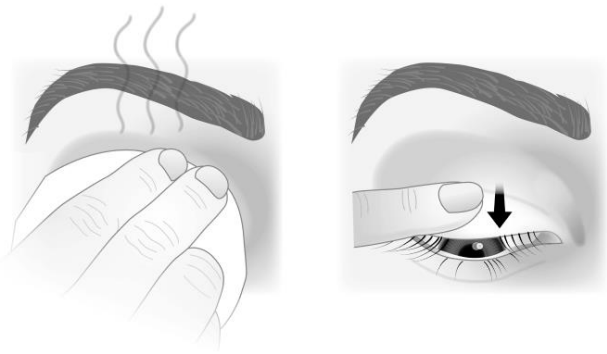
Applying a warm compress (for posterior blepharitis):

Using a warm compress helps to melt the old thick oil in the lids. When this is melted you can massage the lids to push the old oil out. This will allow new clear oil to be produced.

Place the warm compress on the lids for 5 minutes then remove. You then need to apply gentle pressure along the whole length of the eyelid towards the lash line. For the upper lids, apply pressure from the top of the lid to the lash line. For the lower lids, apply pressure from the bottom of the lid towards the lash line. Imagine you are squeezing toothpaste.

You can buy microwavable warm compresses (eye masks) from your local pharmacy. They keep warm long enough to melt the oil. Or you can

- use a clean flannel, cotton wool pad or a muslin cloth then,
- moisten it with warm water then,
- wrap it around your finger to gently wipe away excess oil and remove any crust, bacteria, dust or grime that might have built up amongst the lashes.



Finally wrap the cloth or a cotton pad around your finger to gently wipe away excess oil and remove any crust, bacteria, dust or grime that might have built up amongst the lashes.

Important information:

- If you wear contact lenses you should only use water that has previously been boiled. Remove your lenses before starting your cleaning routine. Tap water should never be used with contact lenses.
- **The skin on your eyelid is delicate so make sure the warm compress is not so hot that it burns the skin.**
- Repeat your routine 2 times a day until symptoms start to settle. Carry on doing your lid hygiene routine once a day as this will help to control symptoms.

Lid health

More screen time has been shown to cause poor blinking. This causes more dry eye issues.

The tear film needs to be spread over the eye by the lids. If the lids do not close fully your eyes will be dry.

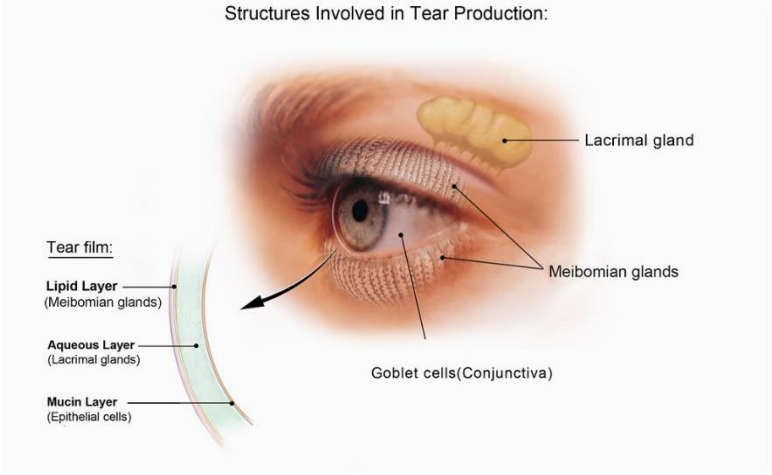
Below is a simple lid exercise you can do to help your blinking.

Blinking exercises to help dry eye

You have been prescribed blinking exercise as you are either

- not blinking enough or
- are not blinking fully (partial blinking)

This exercise will help you train your blinking.



Instructions:

The exercise makes sure that the top lid touches the bottom lid and that you blink enough each day.

Each time you blink fully the tears are spread over the eye. The meibomium glands that produce oil are squeezed. This helps them to stay open. The oil from the lids helps dry eye.

Follow these steps

1. Gently close the eyes fully – count 1,2
2. Squeeze the lids together - count 1,2
3. Open the eyes-count 1,2
4. Repeat the exercise 5 times

This exercise should be repeated every waking hour for 2 weeks. Then at least 4 times a day – or once an hour if at the computer.

Blinking exercises for dry eye, Dry Eye Centre, London www.dryeyecentre.co.uk

Things you can do to treat and prevent blepharitis

Do not:

- wear contact lenses while you have symptoms.
- wear any eye make-up, especially eyeliner, while you have symptoms.

Do:

- clean your eyelids at least once a day.
- continue the cleaning routine for your eyes even if your symptoms clear up.

Flax seed oil or omega 3 supplements and a healthy diet, including oily fish, can help eyes and eyelids to stay healthy.

Some patients also benefit from artificial tear drops. You can buy these from your local pharmacy or optician.

Contact details

If you have any further questions, please talk to your GP or optician.

For any urgent concerns you can contact the Eye Casualty Department on 0116 258 6273.

Health information and support is available at www.nhs.uk or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice

Visit www.uhleicester.nhs.uk for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals.

To give feedback about this information sheet, contact uhl-tr.informationforpatientsmailbox@nhs.net

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