Treating a chalazion (meibomian cyst) on your eyelid with hot compress and massage

Ophthalmology Department

Information for Patients

Last reviewed: July 2026
Next review: July 2029
Leaflet number: 916 Version: 4

What is a chalazion?

A chalazion (also known as a meibomian gland cyst) is a small lump, or cyst, on your eyelid. It is usually painless and will feel a bit firmer. It often develops over a period of time, either on the upper or lower eyelid, usually under the skin of the eyelid rather than on the edge.

What causes a chalazion?

Our eyelids are lined with lots of tiny glands, called meibomian glands. They produce oil to keep our eyes moist and healthy.

A chalazion occurs when one of these glands becomes blocked. The oil inside slowly builds up into a cyst. It appears on the eyelid as a small lump and can harden or grow over time.

How is it treated?

Chalazions are mostly harmless. They should get better and then disappear on their own. This can take a few months. To help it disappear we recommend applying a hot compress and massage regularly to the affected eye. This will help to soften the contents of the cyst, and encourage it to drain.

Re-use of this leaflet is restricted by Creative Commons license

How to do warm compresses, massage and eyelid cleaning

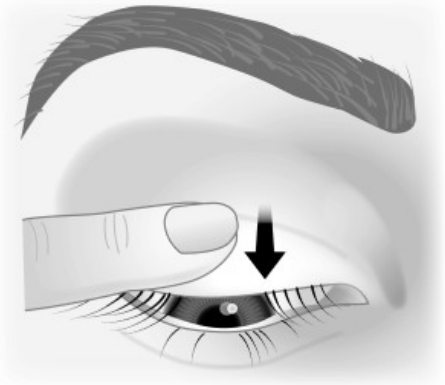
Warm compress: This is used to soften the skin, loosen any crusts attached to the eyelids and make the thickened oil more runny.

To apply a warm compress, place a hot flannel or cotton wool pad on your closed eyelid for about 1 to 3 minutes. You can also use a microwavable eye mask. You can buy these from your local pharmacy.

Take care that the compress is not too hot that it burns the delicate skin on your eyelid.

Important - if you wear contact lenses, you should only use water that has previously been boiled. Tap water should never be used with contact lenses. Take your lenses out before beginning the routine.





Massage: Straight after applying a warm compress, massage your eyelids using your fingers or a with a warm cloth or cotton wool pad wrapped around your finger. Run the length of your finger up and down your eyelids towards your eyelashes. This will help to push the oily fluids from the glands. The massage should be firm but not uncomfortable. Always massage with your eyes shut.

Cleaning your eyelids: Simply use a clean flannel, cotton wool pad or a muslin cloth. Make it damp with warm water and wrap it around your finger. Gently wipe away excess oil and remove any crust, bacteria, dust or grime that might have built up amongst your lashes.

Repeat the above procedure 2 times a day until symptoms start to settle.

What other advice should I follow while ?

Do not:

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

Do:

- clean your eyelids at least once a day.
- continue to clean your eyes, even if your symptoms clear up.

What could happen if a chalazion is left untreated?

The lump may get bigger and the affected eyelid could get swollen. This can be uncomfortable. Most will get better by themselves slowly, but can sometimes take 12 to 24 months.

What if this treatment does not work?

If the lump continues to grow and does not respond to warm compress and massage, you may need antibiotic eye drops or ointment. If antibiotics do not work, you may need a small surgical procedure called ‘incision and curettage’. This is done under local anaesthetic (see separate leaflet 492).

Contact details

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

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

اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی اور زبان میں درکار ہیں، تو براہِ کرم مندرجہ ذیل نمبر پر ٹیلی فون کریں۔
على هذه المعلومات بلغةٍ أخرى، الرجاء الاتصال على رقم الهاتف الذي يظهر في الأسفل
જો તમને અન્ય ભાષામાં આ માહિતી જોઈતી હોય, તો નીચે આપેલ નંબર પર કૃપા કરી ટેલિફોન કરો

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਹੇਠਾਂ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਗਏ ਨੰਬਰ 'ਤੇ ਟੈਲੀਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ।

Aby uzyskać informacje w innym języku, proszę zadzwonić pod podany niżej numer telefonu

If you would like this information in another language or format such as EasyRead or Braille, please telephone 0116 250 2959 or email uhl-tr.equalitymailbox@nhs.net

LEICESTER'S RESEARCH

Leicester’s Hospitals is a research active trust so you may find research happening on your ward or in your clinic. To find out about the benefits of research and become involved yourself, speak to your clinician or nurse, call 0116 258 8351 or visit www.uhleicester.nhs.uk/research/patients-public/be-part-of-our-research/