

Watery eyes (blocked tear duct) in babies

Paediatric Ophthalmology

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Information for Patients

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What is a blocked tear duct?

The tear duct is the small tube which lets tears drain. Your child's eye may water a lot. This can be because there is blockage in the tube system. This means the tears cannot be drained fully.

It is very common for babies to be born with tear ducts that are not fully open. This happens to 1 in 5 babies. 9 out of ten cases of blocked tear ducts open by the age of 1 year old without any treatment. Only 1 in 100 cases of blocked tear ducts need surgery to open by the age of 2 years old.

Does the watering cause damage?

Watering does not cause damage to your child's eye. Their sight will be unaffected. You may see some discharge around your child's eyes. This can cause redness and dryness of the skin.

We recommend an eyelid cleaning routine using cooled boiled water and cotton pads. Use a barrier moisturising cream (like Vaseline) to protect the skin around the eye. Do not put this cream into your child's eye. You do not need to use eye drops on your child.

Do not send your child to school or nursery if their watering eyes are:

- red
- swollen
- infected

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or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

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Can I help the tear ducts open?

Regular massaging of the tear duct area (tear sac massage) can remove the blockage and help symptoms.

1. Make sure you have trimmed your nails before starting.
2. Gently massage in the inner corner of the child's eye. Massaging over the nose will not have any effect. Your little finger may be best to get in the right area (see photo below).
3. You should do this massage at least 2 times a day. Do 10 attempts each time, on each eye.
4. If your baby does not like this, you can try doing this during feeding or when the child is asleep. A video of this can be found at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=I35MtFqFCmY



If massaging does not help and your child still has watering eyes over the age of 1 years old, see your GP. Ask your GP to send you to the Children's Eye Department. They will help you to find out more ways to fix the blockage.

Contact details

Orthoptic department: **0116 258 5277**

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