

Treating watery eyes caused by a narrow tear duct opening with a perforated punctal plug

Ophthalmology Department

Information for Patients

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Introduction

One reason for having watery eye is when the tear canals (also called tear ducts) at the inner corner of the eye, become narrow (stenosis) or close completely. This can happen for many reasons like ageing, injury, and infections.

This is one of several conditions that can lead to a watery eye. Some people may have more than 1 problem at the same time causing this.

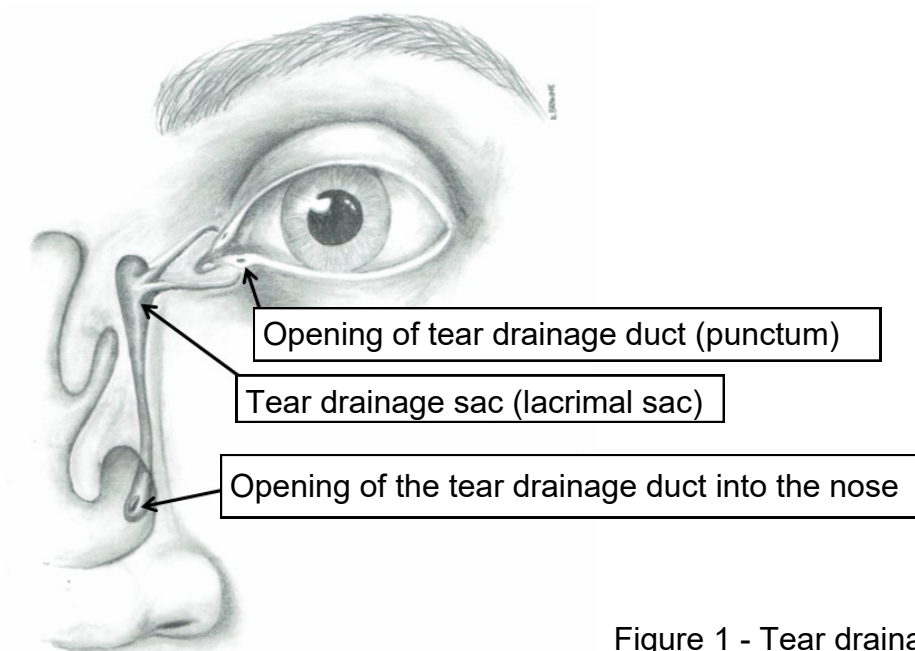


Figure 1 - Tear drainage system (lacrimal system).

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What is the treatment for this?

A perforated punctal plug is a very small silicone arrowhead shaped tube that is fitted into the opening of the tear canal. They do not 'plug' the canal. It has channel that lets tears flow through. See the picture below.



(with permission: Moshifar M, Moran Eye Centre, University of Utah)

When are they used?

In clinic, we will look closely at your eye under magnification. We will look for any blockage (punctal stenosis) at the opening of the tear canal.

We also need to look for blockages further down the tear drainage system between the eyes and the nose. We usually see you as an outpatient visit. We syringe to check if water can be flushed down into the throat from the tear canal. Sometimes the canal is so narrow that this is not possible. If there is a blockage further down the system, inserting this plug will not work to reduce watering from your eye.

How is a punctal plug inserted?

We often do this procedure in theatre using a microscope. We will give you a small injection of local anaesthetic into the skin near your eye to numb the area.

The procedure takes about 10 minutes. Prepare to wait half a day on ward as there will be many other patients waiting for this procedure.

Aftercare

You may have mild bruising and/ or swelling for the first few days. We will give you eye drops to use for 2 weeks.

You can do all activities as normal. Do not go swimming for 2 weeks after your procedure.

When is it removed?

We often leave the plug in place for 2 to 3 months. We will take it out in clinic with a pair of fine forceps. We will do this making sure you do not feel pain. While the plugs are in place they usually stretch the opening of the tear canal. This should reduce watering from your eye even after the plug is taken out.

What is the success rate?

If there are no other factors causing watery eyes, the plug can treat the problem in around 80 in 100 patients.

What are the possible complications?

This is a safe procedure. However, with every procedure there is a risk of complications:

- The plug may come out on their own (25 to 50 in 100 patients). This is not a problem if it happens more than 3 weeks after the procedure. If it happens before 3 weeks, you may need to repeat the procedure in a few weeks.
- You may feel discomfort when the plug is inserted. This is often mild and does not last long. Your eyes will feel back to normal within a week.
- You may have irritation/ itching/ feeling of having something in your eye. These will go away once the plug is taken out.
- You may get dry eye. This is uncommon but may need treatment if it is causing you a problem.
- The plug may move down the tear canal ('lost'). This is rare but can cause the watering or any infection to become worse. You may need surgery in the future to remove the plug.



- A lump of scar tissue can develop around the opening of the tear canal (pyogenic granuloma). This may get better with drops or you may need a small procedure to remove it.

Contact details

If you have any more questions please contact:

Oculoplastic Specialist Team on **0116 204 7971** (Monday to Friday, 8am to 5pm)

Eye Casualty Department on Saturday, Sunday and bank holidays
(8.30am to 12.30pm) on **0116 258 6273**.

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