



Dry Eye Syndrome Symptoms and Treatment

Persistent dryness, scratching and burning in your eyes are signs of dry eye syndrome. These symptoms alone may be enough for your eye doctor to diagnose dry eye syndrome. Sometimes he or she may want to measure the amount of tears in your eyes. A thin strip of filter paper placed at the edge of the eye, called a Schirmer test, is one way of measuring this.

Some people also experience a "foreign body sensation," the feeling that something is in the eye. And it may seem odd, but sometimes watery eyes can result from dry eye syndrome, because the excessive dryness works to overstimulate production of the watery component of your eye's tears.

High-risk factors for Chronic Dry Eye (CDE) include:

- Hormonal Changes
- Medical Conditions (eg., diabetes)
- Autoimmune disease (eg., Sjogren's Syndrome)

What Causes Dry Eyes?

Tears bathe the eye, washing out dust and debris and keeping the eye moist. They also contain enzymes that neutralize the microorganisms that colonize the eye. Tears are essential for good eye health.

In dry eye syndrome, the eye doesn't produce enough tears, or the tears have a chemical composition that causes them to evaporate too quickly.

Dry eye syndrome has several causes. It occurs as a part of the natural aging process, especially during menopause; as a side effect of many medications, such as antihistamines, antidepressants, certain blood pressure medicines, Parkinson's medications and birth control pills; or because you live in a dry, dusty or windy climate. If your home or office has air conditioning or a dry heating system, that too can dry out your eyes. Another cause is insufficient blinking, such as when you're staring at a computer screen all day.

Dry eyes are also a symptom of systemic diseases such as lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, rosacea or Sjogren's syndrome (a triad of dry eyes, dry mouth, and rheumatoid arthritis or lupus).

Long-term contact lens wear is another cause; in fact, dry eyes are the most common complaint among contact lens wearers. Recent research indicates that contact lens wear and dry eyes can be a vicious cycle. Dry eye syndrome makes contact lenses feel uncomfortable, and the rubbing of the lenses against the conjunctiva seems to be a cause of dry eyes.

Incomplete closure of the eyelids, eyelid disease and a deficiency of the tear-producing glands are other causes. Tears are composed of three layers: the outer, oily, lipid layer; the middle, watery, lacrimal layer; and the inner, mucous or mucin layer. Each layer is produced by a different part of the eye (the lacrimal gland produces the lacrimal layer, for example), so a problem with any of those sources can result in dry eyes.

Dry eye syndrome is more common in women, possibly due to hormone fluctuations. Recent research suggests that smoking, too, can increase your risk of dry eye syndrome. With increased popularity of eyelid surgery (blepharoplasty) for improved appearance, dry eye complaints now occasionally are associated with incomplete closure of eyelids following a procedure.

Dry eyes can become red and irritated, causing a feeling of scratchiness. Panoptx sunglasses can help with dry eyes because they keep out wind, pollen and dust with their Orbital Seal; 99 percent of wearers in a study reported a decrease in overall dry eye symptoms.

Treatment for Dry Eyes

Dry eye syndrome is an ongoing condition that may not be cured (depends on the cause), but the accompanying dryness, scratchiness and burning can be managed. Your eyecare practitioner may prescribe **artificial tears**, which are lubricating eyedrops that may alleviate the dry, scratching feeling.

Restasis eyedrops (cyclosporine in a castor oil base) go one step further: they help your eyes to increase tear production. Restasis treatment is the first of its kind

Sometimes people use the eye drops that "get the red out" to treat their dry eyes. This won't work unless the eye drops also contain artificial tears, and the original "get-the-red-out" formulation doesn't. These drops can reduce or eliminate the redness temporarily, but they don't treat the cause of the redness, whether it's dryness, environmental irritation or some other problem.

Not only that, but the vasoconstrictors in those formulas that reduce redness by contracting the eye's blood vessels are addictive, in the sense that over time, more and more is needed to achieve the same effect. And with frequent use, the effect diminishes after a while, anyway — the blood vessels simply won't constrict as much as they did when you first used the drops.

If you wear contact lenses, be aware that many eye drops, especially artificial tears, cannot be used while your contacts are in your eyes. You'll need to remove them before using drops and wait 15 minutes or even longer (check the label) before reinserting the lenses. If your eye dryness is mild, then contact lens rewetting drops may be sufficient to make your eyes feel better, but the effect is usually only temporary.

Check the label, but better yet, check with your optometrist or ophthalmologist before buying any over-the-counter eye drops. It will probably save you a lot of money, because he or she will know which formulas are effective and long-lasting and which ones are not, as well as which eye drops will work with your contact lenses.

Artificial tears help dry eyes feel better. Don't confuse artificial tears with formulas that just "get the red out."

If the problem is environmental, you should always wear sunglasses when outdoors, to reduce exposure to sun, wind and dust. You may want to try the kind that has a foam or other seal at the sides, to keep wind and dust from getting to your eyes at the top, bottom and sides (see photo on this page). Indoors, an air cleaner can filter out dust and other particles from the air, while a humidifier adds moisture to air that's too dry because of air conditioning or heating.