



Dry Eyes

Dry eyes can affect anyone, but it becomes more common with increasing age. Dry eye affects about 7 in 100 people in their 50s, and about 15 in 100 people in their 70s. Women are affected more often than men.

The causes of dry eyes

The eyes normally make a small amount of tears all the time to lubricate the front of the eye. Tears are made by the tiny lacrimal glands (tear glands) above each eye. The tears then drain down the tear duct into the nose. Anything that reduces the normal amount of tears that are made may result in dry eyes. The causes include:

- **Ageing - Often, as one gets older, tear production lessens.**
- **Medication - Some medicines which you may take for other conditions sometimes have a side effect of causing dry eyes, or make dry eyes worse. These include:**
 - Diuretics ('water tablets')
 - Some antidepressants
 - Antihistamines
 - Some treatments for anxiety and other psychological problems
 - The contraceptive pill
 - Beta-blockers.
- **Illness - Some people develop dry eyes as a symptom of a more general disease. For example, dry eyes may occur with rheumatoid arthritis, SLE (systemic lupus erythematosus), and Sjogren's syndrome.**
- **Unknown - Some younger people have no apparent cause for the reduced amount of tears and dry eyes.**

What are the symptoms of dry eyes?

Both eyes are usually affected. The eyes may not actually feel 'dry'. Symptoms include:

- Irritation in the eyes. The eyes may feel gritty or burning. However, the eyes do not go red. If they do, another eye problem is usually present.
- Slight blurring of vision from time to time. However, dry eyes do not affect the seeing part of the eye, and dry eyes do not cause permanent damage to vision.
- You may not like bright lights.
- If you wear contact lenses, you may find they become uncomfortable.

Some people with dry eyes also develop inflamed eyelids (See our information sheet on blepharitis).