



For Your Health

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Dry Eyes

Probably the most common problem seen in the ophthalmologist's office is dry eyes. As we age, the protective tear film on the surface of the eye diminishes. This leaves the delicate tissues of the eye exposed to the drying effects of air, wind, dust, and the sun. The eye can still make tears; in fact, many patients complain of wet eyes and tearing with this malady. That's because the dryness produces a reflex tearing in an effort to keep the eye well lubricated.

In many people, the dryness is worse in the afternoon and evenings. Since we blink less frequently when we read, reading can also aggravate the symptoms of dry eyes. Sometimes, environmental factors play a role as well. Dry weather, either in hot or cold temperatures, robs the eye of needed lubricants. Cigarette smoke, fumes, dust, and airborne particles are common irritants. In most patients, this condition is NOT associated with any systemic disease.

Symptoms include burning, stinging, or a gritty sensation which may come and go depending on many factors. Itching, tearing, and light sensitivity may bother other patients. Occasionally, long strings of mucus can be stretched from a dry eye.

TREATMENT helps in most patients. We cannot cure this condition, so treatment must be an ongoing project. Usually artificial tears, available over-the-counter, soothe the eyes and give temporary relief. The most commonly used ones are HYPOTEAR[®], TEARS NATURAL[®], TEARS PLUS[®], and REFRESH[®]. The problem is that they only work for an hour or two, at best, and must be repeated at frequent intervals. Ointments last longer, but they blur vision and are most effective at night. The best ointments are DURATEARS[®], HYPOTEAR[®], and LACRILUBE[®].

Newer methods of treatment for seriously dry eyes are soft contact lenses in combination with artificial tears. Sometimes, a slow-release medicine under the lower lid is helpful as well.

Much research is being done on this subject because it is such a common problem. Time-release artificial tears seem to hold the most promise, but details of its use are still being worked out.



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