



BLEPHARITIS

What is blepharitis?

Blepharitis is a very common infection/inflammation of the eyelids caused by bacteria that live normally on our skin producing irritating chemicals. As a result special tear glands, called meibomian glands, located in the eyelids, get blocked up. Since these glands help to make our tears, blepharitis results in the production of abnormal tears. This is not a lack of tears, but tears that are of poor quality. It is known that blepharitis is often associated with skin problems such as dandruff and dermatitis.

How do I know if I have blepharitis?

You will know that you have blepharitis if the rims of the eyelids are red and little crusts stick the eyelashes together. The whites of the eyes are often red and sore. In the mornings the eyelids stick together, sometimes with a yellow discharge. These changes cause the eyes to be sore and irritable, with a gritty foreign body feeling. Watering of the affected eye is common.

Is it serious?

No, it is not serious, and only very rarely causes any permanent damage to the eyes. However, blepharitis is a very persistent problem. (Blepharitis which is confined to the eyelid(s) on one side only should however be viewed with suspicion as very rare tumours can mimic blepharitis and lead to misdiagnosis).

Can it be treated?

Yes, though treatment usually can only control the problem and cannot eradicate it altogether.

What is the treatment?

The chief treatment is massage of the eyelids, using soft pads and hot water.

You should buy some cotton pads or balls. Boil up some water and pour the water into a bowl.

When the water has cooled enough for you to be able to touch it without burning your skin, but before it is cold, soak a pad in the water and press it firmly against your closed eyelids.

You will need to press quite firmly, for about a minute.

Finally, use the pad to stroke your eyelashes, in an up-down then side-to-side manner.

What is the purpose of this hot water massage?

The hot water melts the tears stuck in the blocked up tear glands. Along with the pressure, this helps to unblock the glands, so that your tears become normal.

Wiping the eyelashes gets rid of the crusts and the bacteria.



How often should I do this?

Depending on how bad your blepharitis is, you may need to massage the eyelids up to twice a day regularly.

Is that all I have to do?

In addition to regular massage, an antibiotic ointment e.g. Chloramphenicol, rubbed into the lashes at night, can clear the infection. A course of ointment, usually for a month, can be repeated several times a year. Ointments/drops containing steroids should not be used unless prescribed by an ophthalmologist.

Since blepharitis causes tears to be abnormal, artificial tears can give relief from irritation, even when your eyes are watering (eyes can water as a reflex reaction to a basic dry eye problem or tear film abnormality). These should be used 3-4 times a day at least to prevent symptoms rather than to just relieve symptoms. There is a large variety of artificial tear preparations to choose from:

Preservative free: Systane drops preservative free, Viscotears preservative free, Liquifilm tears preservative free, Celluvisc drops, or Minims artificial tears (these are more expensive but should be used when artificial tears are required more than 4 times a day).

With preservatives: Systane, Viscotears, Hypotears, Liquifilm tears, SNO tears.

Lacrilube ointment is very effective at night but can cause blurring of vision in the morning.