



Dry Eyes

You have been given this leaflet because you have asked for dry eye treatment that you can get “over the counter” (OTC) from pharmacies. After a local and national public consultation on OTC medicines, we do not prescribe simple dry eye treatment anymore. Dry eye disease, is a common condition that occurs when the eyes don't make enough tears, or the tears evaporate quickly leading to the eyes drying out and becoming red, swollen and irritated. Most people are able to treat themselves with OTC products and self-care.

Managing your condition

As well as medical treatments, there are some things you can do yourself to help prevent dry eye syndrome or reduce the symptoms.

- keep your eyes and eyelids clean and protect them from dusty, smoky, windy and dry environments. Use a humidifier to moisten the air.
- avoid wearing contact lenses and use your computer correctly to avoid eye strain
- eat a healthy diet that includes omega-3 and omega-7 fats
- check if any current medication is making it worse – speak to your pharmacist for advice

There are 3 main ways you can maintain eyelid hygiene. These should be performed once or twice a day:

- **Warm compress** – to loosen the oil produced by glands
 - boil water and leave it to cool to a warm temperature
 - soak a clean flannel or eye pad in the warm water and place on the eyes for 10 minutesYou can also buy a special microwaveable compress for your eyes to use instead of a flannel.
- **Eyelid Massage** - gently massage your eyelids to push the oils out of the glands
 - gently massage your closed eyes by rolling your little finger in a circular motion
 - take a cotton wool bud and, with your eyes shut, roll it downwards on the upper eyelid towards the lashes and edges of the eyelids
 - repeat this process along the whole width of the upper and lower eyelids
- **Lid margin hygiene** - wipe away any excess oil and remove any crusts or grime that might have accumulated. Various eyelid-cleaning solutions and wipes are available to buy, or you can try making one at home. For a homemade solution, fill a bowl with one pint of boiled water and allow it to cool to a warm temperature. Then add a teaspoon of bicarbonate of soda.
 - soak some clean cotton wool in the solution and remove crustiness from around the eyelids and eyelashes, repeat if necessary using a clean piece of cotton wool

How do I treat?

Sometimes the tips above for good eyelid hygiene aren't enough to keep symptoms under control. There are many dry eye treatments available to buy OTC to help relieve the symptoms, which include:

- Eye drops to lubricate the eyes containing; hypromellose, carbomer, carmellose, polyvinyl alcohol or sodium hyaluronate. You may find that one product suits you better than another.
- **Speak to your pharmacist**- for advice on which treatment is best for your symptoms.

When should I seek advice?

Although dry eye syndrome may be uncomfortable, it doesn't usually cause any serious problems. The two main complications associated with dry eye syndrome are:

- **Conjunctivitis** – inflammation of the transparent layer of cells that covers the white part of the eyeball and the inner surfaces of the eyelids; most cases are mild and don't need specific treatment. **Visit your Pharmacy** if you suspect you have this for further treatment advice.
- **Inflammation of the cornea** – in rare cases, severe untreated dry eye syndrome can damage the surface of the cornea (keratitis); this damage can make the cornea vulnerable to ulceration and infection, which could potentially threaten your sight.

Contact your optometrist or GP, or visit your nearest accident and emergency (A&E) department immediately if you have any of the following symptoms, as they could be a sign of a more serious condition:

- extreme sensitivity to light (photophobia), very painful or red eyes, a deterioration in your vision.

For more information

- visit your local pharmacy for advice

Find out more about self-care at www.nhs.uk

Be self-care aware