



DRY EYES – “Sicca Syndrome”

If you have eye burning, scratchy sensation, or irritation, you may be suffering from decreased tear production or “dry eye syndrome”. As strange as it may seem, occasional tearing or “watery eyes” is also a common symptom of “dry eyes”!

While usually an annoyance only, often dry eyes can take on much more serious manifestations in a body-wide distribution. Sjogren’s syndrome patients have extremely dry eyes and mouth.

While your symptoms may flare up and then disappear over the years, these chronic conditions need to be managed over the course of your life, and are not something you should be expecting to be “cured” in a few days or weeks.

The most important treatment is to recognize the need for artificial lubrication to supplement your natural tears. These are available “over the counter” without a prescription. You may use them as often as you like. In general, patients don’t use these drops nearly enough, and are then disappointed when they are “not working”. Often, they need to be used 4-5 times daily, and even MORE frequently during activities associated with less blinking, such as reading or driving. Many patients complain of blurry vision on prolonged reading. Using drops can help more than you might expect.

RULES OF THUMB:

1. There are many brands of “over the counter” drops and ointments for lubrication. We recommend looking for “preservative-free” or “low toxicity preservative” containing brands. These come in individual vials (that CAN be used more than once!), or bottles. See the brands below:
2. The thicker and more “viscous” the drop, the longer it will provide relief, but the more “blurry” will be the vision at first, and the longer it will take to clear. This is not harmful, but may be irritating if not expected.

LIGHTER / THINNER	MEDIUM / ALL-PURPOSE	THICKEST / LONG-LASTING
HypoTears	GenTeal (drops)	Celluvisc
Bion Tears	Optive	GenTeal Gel
	Refresh	Refresh LiquiGel
	Systane	
		Ophthalmic ointments

MORE AGGRESSIVE TREATMENTS

If the symptoms are severe enough to require artificial lubricants so frequently as to impair the quality of your life, more aggressive measures are available.

1. Thinking of your eye as a kitchen sink helps to understand how using artificial tears is like “turning on the faucet”. Similarly, “plugging the drain” helps more lubricating fluid to collect and bathe the eye surface. Methods to close the eyelid drainage ducts allow the tears (both natural and artificial tears) to collect. This can be done temporarily to determine the effect, or if desired, can be done permanently in an office-based procedure.
2. New medicines like Restasis have been shown to actually increase the tears produced in some patients, especially those who have auto-immune problems, such as rheumatoid arthritis or Sjogren’s syndrome. Unfortunately, Restasis is very expensive, and often not covered by insurance without a fight. It also may not begin to show a therapeutic effect for up to 3-4 months, so it requires a commitment to “stay the course”, and continue to use the twice daily drops.

OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL THINGS THAT CAN HELP:

1. Try using a humidifier to increase the moisture in your work office.
2. Minimize exposure to hair-dryers, windy situations, smoky rooms, as all can increase evaporation from the surface of the eye. Airplane flights or long car trips (with blowing air conditioning) are commonly the source of “dry eye crises”.
3. Some systemic medications are associated with worsening dry-eye symptoms. Anything with anti-histamine effects and anti-depressants have been associated with problems. Of course, each patient needs to weigh the risk – benefit considerations of their medications with the convenience of using artificial tears.

If you have questions regarding your eyes, please know that we are always available for your call or visit. Thank you for your confidence.