

## DRY EYES

### Q What is dry eye syndrome?

A Dry eye syndrome is a condition where your eyes do not make enough tears or your tears evaporate too quickly. This can lead to your eyes becoming dry, gritty and inflamed.

It is a common condition affecting between 15% and 30% of people at some point during their life. It is more common among older people and generally affects more women than men.

Dry eye syndrome is normally not serious. However, there are some rare cases where severe untreated dry eye syndrome has caused visual impairment and scarring of the eyes' surface.

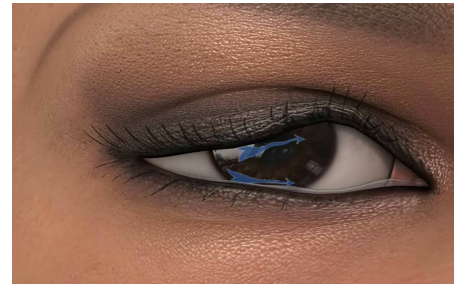
### Q What are the symptoms and signs?

A The symptoms of dry eye syndrome may include:

- feelings of dryness, grittiness, or soreness in both eyes, which get worse throughout the day
- red eyes
- eyes water particularly when exposed to wind
- eyelids stick together on waking.
- transient blurring of vision
- sensitivity to light

### Q What causes dry eye syndrome?

A The front of the eye is bathed in tears which are produced by glands around the eyes. The tears contain a mixture of water, proteins, fats, mucus, and infection-fighting cells and serve a number of vital functions including lubricating the eye and eyelids, providing a smooth optical surface and providing the cornea with vital oxygen and nutrients. The tears are swept across the eyes by the eyelids before draining through two tiny holes in the eyelid margins.



If any of the glands that produce the tears fail to make their contribution, the quantity and the quality of tears will decline and dry eye syndrome can result. Tear production is controlled by the nervous system and has been linked to various hormones. A number of eye diseases and general medical conditions can affect the quality and quantity of tears as can many drugs.

Environmental factors such as sun, wind, air conditioning and smoke can have a drying effect on your eyes, causing the tears to evaporate more quickly.

### Q What can be done to help?

A Once dry eye syndrome develops, some people have recurring episodes for the rest of their lives. Although no cure exists for dry eye syndrome, there are a range of treatments, such as eye drops, that can relieve the symptoms.

In some cases changes to the environment are all that is required. Increasing the humidity in a room, avoiding smoky atmospheres and wearing sunglasses can help.

Mild to moderate cases of dry eye syndrome can normally be successfully treated with eye

drops that contain 'tear substitutes', a liquid that is designed to mimic the properties of tears. These eye drops are available from a pharmacy over-the-counter (OTC) without prescription. There are many different types of eye drops, so you can try a different type, if your original choice proves ineffective.



Ointment can also be used to help lubricate your eyes. However, it can often cause blurred vision so it is probably best to use it last thing at night.

Another approach is to try and keep the tears in the eye for longer by partially blocking the tiny holes through which the tears drain. Your optometrist will be able to advise if you are suitable for this form of treatment.

There is some evidence that eating a diet that is high in omega-3 fats can help prevent dry eye syndrome. The best source of omega-3 fats are oily fish such as mackerel, salmon, sardines, tuna, and herring.

