

Blepharitis:

A Common and

Chronic Condition

Blepharitis is a common condition that causes inflammation of the eyelids. It is a chronic external eye disorder resulting in red, burning and irritated eyes. The cause of blepharitis is chronic inflammation at the base of the eyelashes, which results in the production of dandruff-like flakes and inflammation of the oil glands located below the eyelashes. These oil glands are responsible for producing the outermost layer of the tear film. With blepharitis, the oils from these glands do not flow freely and the gland openings become plugged. Blepharitis frequently occurs in people who have a tendency towards oily skin and dandruff. It can occur at any age.

Symptoms

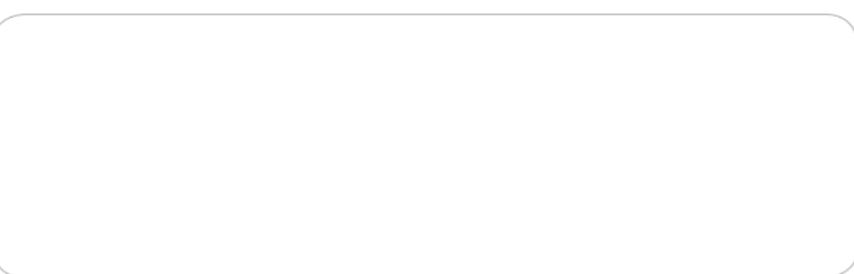
Left untreated, these glands can become irritated and possibly infected. Loss of eyelashes can occur, as well as recurrent painful eyelid swelling or styes. Dandruff-like scales may be found at the base of the eyelashes. Many patients complain of burning eyes, worse in the morning upon awakening, in addition to their eyelids being matted shut.

Treatment

Since blepharitis is a chronic condition, there is no cure. While over-the-counter treatments for blepharitis are available, it is advisable you consult your Doctor of Optometry if you experience these symptoms to accurately diagnose the condition. There are several ways to treat blepharitis. Cleaning away the crusty material around

the lashes with warm compresses — a clean face cloth soaked in warm water — helps keep the lashes clean if done at least twice daily. This technique also helps keep the oily component of the tears flowing better. Commercial lid scrubs — medicated pads similar to the ones used to remove eye makeup — help clean the eyelids further. Instead of commercial lid scrubs, patients can dilute a small amount of baby shampoo with warm water. A cotton ball soaked in the diluted shampoo can be carefully applied to the eyelashes. Sometimes, prescription antibiotic ointments applied to the lid margins may help manage the symptoms of blepharitis. Artificial tear and steroid eye drops may also be prescribed by your Doctor of Optometry. In severe cases, oral antibiotics may be required.

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