



Dry Eye:

A Common Problem

Everyone has a thin layer of tears that coats the front surface of our eyes. These tears keep our eyes healthy and comfortable, and are needed for both overall eye health and clear vision. Dry eye occurs when your eyes don't produce enough tears or produce tears that don't have the proper chemical composition.

Dry eye symptoms can result from the normal aging process, hormonal changes, exposure to certain environmental conditions, problems with normal blinking, or from medications such as antihistamines, oral contraceptives or antidepressants. Dry eye can also be a symptom of general health problems, such as arthritis, or can result from UV exposure and environmental irritants.

Symptoms

The common symptoms of dry eye include stinging, gritty, scratchy and uncomfortable eyes, fluctuating vision, and a burning feeling or a feeling of a foreign body within the eye. In moderate to severe cases, you may experience blurred vision, light sensitivity or even periods of excess tearing.

Diagnosis

During an eye examination, your Doctor of Optometry focuses on your general health, use of medications, and your home and work environments to determine what may be causing dry eye symptoms. Your Doctor of Optometry will also use a high-powered microscope and special dyes to evaluate the quality, amount and distribution of tears to detect signs of dry eyes.

Risks

If dry eye is left untreated, it can be harmful. Excessive dry eye can damage and possibly scar the sensitive corneal tissues of your eye, impairing vision. Dry eye can make contact lens wear more difficult.

Treatment

Dry eye is usually chronic, and although there is no cure, your Doctor of Optometry can offer treatment to manage the condition and improve your comfort. Artificial lubricating eye drops or ointments may be used, and in more severe cases, small plugs may be inserted in the corner of the eyelids to slow drainage and loss of tears. Treating any underlying systemic disease, or changing your diet to include items such as fish or flax seed oil, can also be helpful at times. New prescription medications are now available to help your body produce more of its own tears.

Doctors of Optometry are a single source for all your vision, eye health and eyewear needs. For information about many other common eye-related conditions, visit our website's Eye Health Library. For answers to commonly asked questions, visit our Ask a Doctor of Optometry Facebook page at facebook.com/AskaDoctorofOptometry.

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