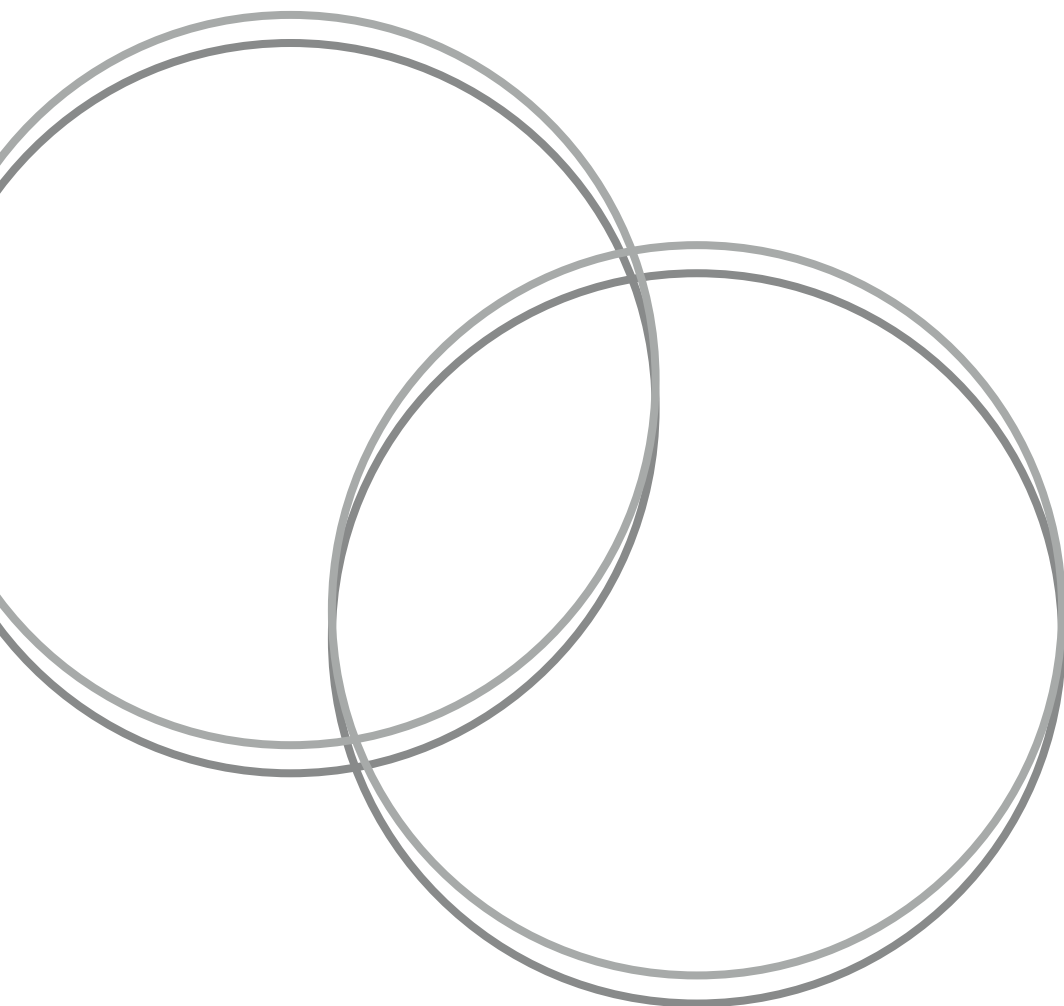




**Oxford University Hospitals**  
NHS Foundation Trust

# **Dry eyes**

**Information for patients**



**Oxford Eye Hospital**

## **What are dry eyes?**

The tear film that covers the surface of the eye is produced by glands in the eyelids and around the eye. Tears keep the surface of the eyes wet, which keeps your eyes clean and protects them against infection. If your eyes don't produce enough tears, or if your tears dry up (evaporate) too quickly, this will lead to dry eyes.

## **What causes dry eyes?**

There are many causes of dry eyes, such as age-related changes in the eye, dry or dusty working conditions and central heating. Occasionally, it can be related to other medical conditions such as Sjogren's syndrome, rheumatoid arthritis and thyroid eye disease, or a skin condition such as rosacea. The condition is more likely to affect people over 60 and is more common in women than in men. If you are taking eye drops to treat other eye conditions such as Glaucoma which contain preservatives, these can also cause dry eyes. Your eye doctor may prescribe you with lubricating drops together with your glaucoma drops.

## **Signs and symptoms**

- A gritty or scratchy feeling in your eyes.
- Soreness.
- Feeling as if there is something in your eye.
- Itching and burning.
- Discomfort or pain.
- Often the eye is completely normal to look at.

## Treatment

This consists of lubricating eye drops to use during the day and possibly some ointment to use last thing at night which can make your vision blurry first thing in the morning. You can clean your eyes using cooled boiled water and cotton wool. Different types of lubricating eye drops can be bought over the counter at a chemist without a prescription (they are less expensive than a prescription charge), so you need never run out of drops.

You can also apply hot compresses on closed eyelids for 5 to 10 minutes and massage your lid afterwards once a day to promote secretion of oil from the oil glands in your eye lids to help hold the tears in your eyes.

You will need to use the drops quite often at first and then gradually reduce the frequency to just a few times a day to keep your eyes comfortable. You will eventually be able to judge how often you need to use them.

As the drops are used to relieve the symptoms and are not a cure for the condition, you will probably always need to use them.

Sometimes, for severely dry eyes, tiny silicone plugs can be inserted into the little tear drainage channels at the inner corner of each eye. These plugs help to preserve any tears for maximum effect, to keep the eye moist and healthy.

## What would happen without treatment?

It is important to treat this condition. Without treatment complications such as scarring of your cornea (the transparent layer at the front of the eye) and conjunctivitis (inflammation, or infection, of your eye) can occur and your eye sight could be permanently affected.

## Further information

Further information about dry eyes can be found on the following website:

**[patient.info/eye-care/eye-problems/dry-eyes](http://patient.info/eye-care/eye-problems/dry-eyes)**

## Further information

If you would like an interpreter, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

Please also tell them if you would like this information in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic
- another language.

We have tried to make the information in this leaflet meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They are happy to help.

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[www.ouh.nhs.uk/information](http://www.ouh.nhs.uk/information)



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