

Dry Eyes

General Information

Dry eyes is a common eye problem. If you have dry eyes, your eyes are either not producing enough tears or are not producing normal tears. This condition is often called dry eye syndrome.

There are two types of tears:

- **lubricating tears**
help keep your eyes moist, clean and healthy.

Lubricating tears contain layers of oil, mucus and water. Dry eye can occur if any of these layers is not normal. The water layer, for example, may be too thin.

- **reflex tears**
are produced in response to irritation, injury or emotion (crying). They can also be a response to dry eye.

If your eyes don't produce lubricating tears, they may become more watery from producing reflex tears.

Signs of Dry Eye

Signs of dry eye may include:

- stinging, burning or scratchy feeling eyes
- excessive tearing
- stringy mucus
- difficulty wearing contact lenses.

Causes of Dry Eye

- **aging**
dry eye occurs most often in the elderly; women are more at risk of developing dry eye than men
- **medicines**
some may affect your ability to produce lubricating tears; these include diuretics, beta blockers and antihistamines
- **diseases**
some reduce tear production
- **environment**
dry air, wind, smoke
- **chemical or heat burns**
they may change the normal content of your tears

Diagnosing Dry Eye

Your eye care provider will check your eyes and ask about:

- the signs of dry eye you have
- your home and work environment
- your overall health
- any prescription or over-the-counter medicines you take.

Your eye care provider may also do some eye tests to help determine the cause of your dry eyes.

Treating Dry Eye

While there is no cure for dry eye, there are treatments available to help relieve the discomfort. Your eye care provider may recommend:

- eye drops called artificial tears during the day
- ointment at night
- a plug for your tear drains to make better use of the lubricating tears you do produce
- laser surgery or minor surgery to close off the tear drains.