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Blepharitis

What is Blepharitis?

Blepharitis is the medical term for inflammation of the eyelid edges. It is a very common condition. It is a chronic (long-term) condition and most people experience repeated episodes followed by periods with no symptoms. It is more of a nuisance than a disease, but may cause problems if untreated.

There are glands in the edge of the eyelids that make part of the tear film that coats the surface of the eye. Blepharitis causes a blockage of these glands with dead skin and oil. If this happens, the tears are less healthy and do not coat the eye effectively. Bacteria grow under these crusts and cause inflammation (redness and swelling).

The inflammation of the lids and the poor tear film leads to symptoms of:

- discomfort
- dryness
- grittiness
- feeling as if there is something in the eyes
- redness

Your doctor or optician will be able to see:

- redness of the lid edges
- whitish scales sticking to the root of the lashes and
- a poor tear film on the surface of the eye

If untreated it can sometimes cause meibomian cysts, styes, conjunctivitis or marginal keratitis.

Aim of treatment

The aim of treatment is to:

- remove all the crust and debris from the edge of the lids
- unblock the glands
- replace the poorly functioning tears if the eyes are dry

The treatments available

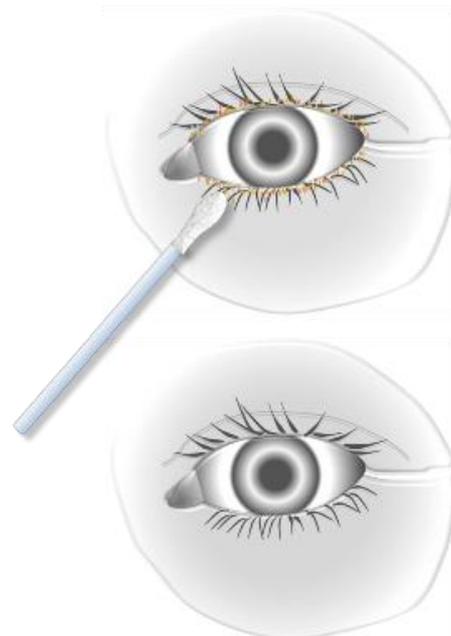
Lid cleaning

The simplest way to clean the lids is by using **face wipes** which are designed to remove make up from the eyes. These are safe to be used around the eyes, convenient, portable and cheap. They can be applied to the lids with the eyes closed, using a side-to-side motion that cleans away the debris on the lashes.

Alternatively, the traditional advice was to use cotton buds and a solution of baby shampoo or sodium bicarbonate.

To do this you will require:

1. A small dish or cup
2. Cotton wool buds
3. Warm water
4. Cleaning solution – which can be **any** of the following:
 - a small amount of baby shampoo (1 part baby shampoo to 10 parts warm water)
 - sodium bicarbonate (1 teaspoon dissolved in a cup of water which has been boiled and then cooled)
 - a lid-cleaning solution (there are a number of commercial products available)



This image was drawn by Santiago Ortiz-Perez and has been approved for use at Dorset County Hospital NHS Foundation Trust by Clinica London.

Use two to three bud tips for each eye. Dip the cotton buds into the cleaning solution and then gently clean along the lid edges near the lashes to remove any crusts and debris from between the eyelashes of the upper and lower lids. Work on a small area at a time and then move on without reusing each cotton bud. Continue along the length of the lashes until they are clear. Rinse the lashes gently with clean water and then dry gently. Repeat on the other eye

These lid-cleaning procedures will need to be repeated at least twice daily at first, but gradually as the condition is brought under control it can be performed less frequently. Blepharitis is an ongoing condition therefore lid cleaning needs to be continued.

Hot compress

When the crusts and debris are difficult to remove and/or meibomian cysts or styes occur, hot compresses may be helpful, especially if performed before lid cleaning. This will help melt the debris blocking the tear glands in the eyelids.

Use a pad of cotton wool or a clean flannel dipped in hot water from the tap. Apply the hot compress to your closed lids. Be careful not to scald (burn) yourself. Reheat and repeat as it cools. Follow this by carrying out your normal 'lid cleaning procedure.'

Eyelid massage

Using a clean finger or cotton bud, firmly stroke the skin of the eyelids towards the eyelashes. This will mean you stroke downwards for massaging the top eyelid and upwards for the bottom lid. This helps express the oils in the glands and helps unblock them.

Antibiotic Ointment

If prescribed antibiotic by your doctor, put a little ointment onto a finger and apply it sparingly to your lashes; rub gently to ensure it reaches the skin between the lashes.

When and for how long will I keep doing this?

Blepharitis tends to be a long-term condition and Eyelid Hygiene treatment needs to be carried out twice-daily for at least two weeks. After this, it may be required less often, stopped or tailored to your symptoms.

Many people find the problem can be kept at bay with continued Eyelid Hygiene and therefore treatment should be restarted if symptoms keep coming back.

Can I buy ready-made Eyelid cleaner?

Yes, there are a few different brands of eyelid wipes available but any good general store will stock face wipes for removing make up, which can be just as effective.

We hope you find this information useful. If you have any other questions please do not hesitate to contact the Eye Department at Dorset County Hospital (01305 255254).