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Chalazion/Meibomian Cyst

What is a Chalazion or Meibomian Cyst?

A chalazion, also known as a meibomian cyst, is a fluid-filled swelling (cyst) which is usually felt as a small lump. It is a common condition affecting the eyelid.

What causes a chalazion?

There are tiny glands just under the inner surface of the eyelid which produce oily fluid to help lubricate the eye. If these glands get blocked, the fluid cannot escape and a fluid-filled swelling (cyst) can form. A chalazion is normally painless; however if it becomes infected, it can become red and painful.

Chalazion is more common in people who have the eye condition blepharitis, or skin conditions such as eczema.

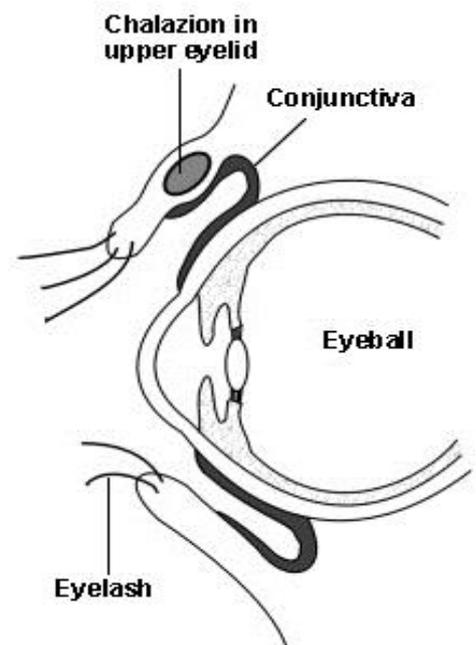


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What are the symptoms of a chalazion?

The small lump often does not cause any symptoms; however it might look unsightly. It can cause mild pain or irritation, particularly at the beginning, however this usually settles. Occasionally, it gets infected. It then becomes more swollen and painful. Sight is not affected. Rarely, it can become so big that it presses on the eyeball and distorts vision.

What is the treatment for a chalazion?

No treatment is often advised at first as up to half of cases get better by themselves. It can take up to six months to resolve and in some cases even longer. It is usually best to 'watch and wait' if it is not causing any problems.

Hot compresses help to ease discomfort. Hold a clean flannel that has been in hot water gently but firmly against the closed eye. Do this for 5-10 minutes, 3-4 times a day. This can help soften the contents of the cyst, helping it drain more easily. (The water should be hot, but comfortable and not scalding.)

Massage of the cyst after using a hot compress can encourage the cyst to drain. Do this gently, with a clean finger or cotton bud, in the direction of the eyelashes.

Cleaning the eyelid twice per day removes grease and grime that may contribute to cysts forming. A weak solution of baby shampoo in warm water is ideal.

A small operation can be performed if it is causing troublesome symptoms. Your GP can refer you to an eye surgeon (ophthalmologist) for this. It is a minor operation carried out under local anaesthetic. The eyelid is numbed, a small cut is made on the inside of the eyelid to release the contents of the cyst.

Note: antibiotic ointments, drops and medicines are not recommended as they do not make any difference - the contents of the cyst are infection-free (sterile).

Are there any complications?

Most fluid-filled swellings (cysts) cause few, if any, problems. Rarely, a cyst can become infected, and this infection can spread to involve the whole eyelid and tissues surrounding the eye. The eyelid may be very swollen and red. You might not be able to open the eye and you may have a lot of pain and a high temperature (fever). If the eye starts to become pushed forward, becomes more light sensitive or you feel feverish and unwell, then you should see a medical professional urgently.

Will it happen again?

For most people a chalazion occurs just once. However, some people are prone to developing them and it may come back (recur). You may be able to prevent it from recurring by using a hot compress on the eyelids (described above) and massaging the eyelids each morning.

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).