

Blepharitis

Blepharitis is a non-contagious inflammation of the eyelids that can affect people of all ages. Blepharitis usually impacts both eyes and occurs at the eyelash line. Unfortunately, this condition in one of its forms is considered chronic and it can be difficult to treat. Patients with blepharitis are usually found to have other skin irritations, such as scalp dandruff and acne rosacea, which should be treated at the same time. There are a rather large variety of symptoms for blepharitis as well as various diseases that can cause it. The good news is blepharitis won't cause any kind of eye damage, although it can be uncomfortable and unsightly.

How To Tell If You Have Blepharitis

The list of symptoms is long, so if you are experiencing two or more of these symptoms and good hygiene doesn't make them go away after a few days, please make an appointment to see your doctor.

- Watery eyes
- Red eyes
- A feeling of grittiness, burning or stinging
- Greasy-looking eyelids
- Itchy eyelids
- Swollen eyelids
- Skin that flakes around the eyes
- Eyelashes that are crusted, especially when waking up in the morning
- Eyelids that stick together
- More blinking than usual
- Eyes that are sensitive to light
- Abnormal growth with your eyelashes, such as eyelashes pointing in the wrong direction
- Loss of eyelashes
- Tears that appear frothy
- Blurred vision

Diagnosing an Eyelid Infection

Your eye doctor is going to want to conduct a comprehensive eye exam to determine the main cause of your blepharitis. This will involve an external exam, including the skin texture of your eyelids and eyelash appearance. Using magnification and light, your doctor will check the base of your eyelashes as well as glandular openings. Finally, your doctor will want to evaluate the quantity and quality of your tears as well. There are two main forms of blepharitis and most patients experience some level of both forms at the same time. Each form has several different types and symptoms:

Anterior Blepharitis arises from bacteria, most commonly, such as staph, or from dandruff on the scalp or eyebrows and is concentrated where the eyelashes are attached to the lids.

- **Staphylococcal blepharitis** is a bacterial infection that can become the most severe type of blepharitis. This type of blepharitis can cause long-term effects and damage to your lid, lashes and eyes if left untreated. It is common for patients to experience pink eye concurrently with this bacteria-caused blepharitis. With this type of blepharitis, patients experience lashes that stick slightly, lid margins that are thickened, and lashes that fall out or stick out at odd angles.
- **Seborrheic blepharitis** is caused by seborrheic dermatitis, a skin condition that exists even on the eyelids and results in flaky, scaly skin. The base of the eyelids will exhibit scales or flakes in this instance.
- **Demodex blepharitis** involves microscopic mites, whose waste can clog eyelash follicles, causing blepharitis. These mites are also associated with skin conditions like rosacea. It should be noted that everyone has microscopic mites on their skin. It is hypothesized by researchers that you could become allergic to the mites or their waste, thereby causing blepharitis.
- **Ulcerative blepharitis** is another bacterial infection-based blepharitis, and this one sits in the base of the eyelashes, and affects the lash follicles and meibomian glands as well. This type can also be from a virus, such as herpes simplex. Another name for this diagnosis is acute blepharitis or acute ulcerative blepharitis. Symptoms from ulcerative blepharitis tend to be a bit more uncomfortable and include hard crusts around the eyelashes that, when removed, leave behind small sores that may ooze and bleed. Eyelash loss and chronic tearing often occur as well. In more serious cases of ulcerative blepharitis, the cornea can become inflamed.

Posterior blepharitis is another form of blepharitis that usually comes about from some sort of disfunction or clogging of the meibomian glands where oils are secreted for eye lubrication and tear retention. Posterior blepharitis is also called meibomian blepharitis, meibomitis or meibomian gland dysfunction (MGD). This is the type of blepharitis that can cause foamy-looking tears and is often the most challenging blepharitis to manage. The lining of the eyelids will look red and swollen and tears will be of very poor quality and not able to do their proper lubricating job. Because of this lack of lubrication, meibomian blepharitis is sometimes diagnosed as a type of dry eye due to glandular dysfunction.

Complications from Blepharitis

Left untreated, blepharitis can result in a number of uncomfortable complications, including:

Stye, which is a painful red bump on the eyelid due to an infected oil gland.

Chalazion then happens following stye development and presents as a painless firm lump. If an infection develops, the lump can then turn red and painful.

Tear film problems mean an inconsistent amount of eye oil secretions, which leads to either too many tears being produced, or not enough resulting in dry eye. Either one of these issues can lead to corneal infections because the right amount of tear film to keep the cornea healthy is not present.

Treatment

Treatment for blepharitis, regardless of the form or type, is usually similar and include:

- frequent washing of scalp and face
- warm compresses on eyes, several times daily, to relieve the discomfort of dry eyelids
- gentle scrubbing of the lashes with a washcloth, a clean one for each eye, using water and baby shampoo
- massaging eyelids to release clogged oil glands
- artificial tears or lubricating ointments
- stop using eye make-up and contact lenses until episode is over
- antibiotics or other medications for bacterial infections

More than likely, if your blepharitis is recurrent, you will need to maintain an eye hygiene regimen the rest of your life in order to be comfortable and keep symptoms down as much as possible. The main things to remember with blepharitis is that it typically stems from either an infection, which can be treated, or from a skin condition, which requires a lifelong eye hygiene regimen for comfort. While that can sound intimidating, keep in mind that there is no medication required, and all the items needed to keep your eyes clear and symptom-free are usually already in your home or available over the counter.