Association of Optometrists

Information for patients

Blepharitis

Blepharitis is a common eye condition that causes the eyelids to become sore and inflamed.

What is blepharitis?

Blepharitis causes eyelids to become red, swollen and inflamed. It doesn't normally cause serious damage to the eyes, but it can be very uncomfortable. It tends to be a long-term condition, which means you're likely to need ongoing treatment. Severe cases do have a risk of causing long-term damage, but fortunately these are quite rare.

Types of blepharitis

There are two main types of blepharitis – anterior and posterior.

Anterior blepharitis

When the front (anterior) part of the eyelids becomes sore, this can be caused by an infection, allergy or a general sensitivity to bacteria present on the eyelids. It can also be associated with some scalp conditions, such as very dry or oily skin and dandruff.

Posterior blepharitis

Also known as meibomian gland dysfunction is when the glands that make the oily part of your tears become blocked. Both types of blepharitis can cause dry eye or make it worse if you already have it. Many people will have a combination of blepharitis, meibomian gland dysfunction and dry eye.

Risk factors

Blepharitis is more common in people over the age of 50, but anyone can develop it. This is often because the glands that make the normal tears, particularly the oily part of the tears, tend to become less effective as you get older.

Symptoms

Blepharitis can cause crusting and white scales may stick to the roots of eyelashes. Your eyelid edges may become red and your eyes will feel gritty, burning, sore or itchy. If you experience these symptoms, make an appointment with your optometrist.

Treatment

There is a range of products designed especially for treating blepharitis, such as sterile pads, individual moist wipes and separate cleaning solutions.

Your optometrist will be able to advise you on where you can buy these products. Antibiotic ointment may be recommended in severe cases.

As part of the treatment, you need to remove all the crusting and debris from the edge of your eyelids and from between your eyelashes. You should use your cleaning product. If this is not available, you should use warm water and cotton balls or make-up removal pads. Treatment of blepharitis is a long-term procedure. You may not see any improvement for several weeks. Continue the treatment twice a day for at least one month, then less often as it starts to get better. You will probably need to continue to clean your lids at least twice a week to help prevent the blepharitis from returning.

Treatment method

- Wash your hands before and after cleaning your eyelids.
- Rub the moistened pad or cotton ball firmly but gently along the eyelid edges to remove the crusts and debris.
- Take care to wipe between the eyelashes of both the upper and lower lids.
- Use a fresh pad or wipe

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About the AOP

The Association of Optometrists (AOP) is the voice of the optical profession, representing over 80% of practising optometrists. The AOP elevates the work of its members, safeguards their interests, and champions eye health across the UK. For more information, visit **www.aop.org.uk**