



A clear view of dry eye

Gain an understanding of the causes, symptoms,
and importance of treating dry eye disease

What is dry eye?

Everyone may experience periods where their eyes feel dry. However, some people develop a serious condition called dry eye disease that requires long-term treatment to keep eyes comfortable and healthy.



Dry eye disease is very common. In the United States, it's estimated that approximately 16.4 million adults have been diagnosed. The chances of developing the disease increase with age, and it tends to affect more women than men.

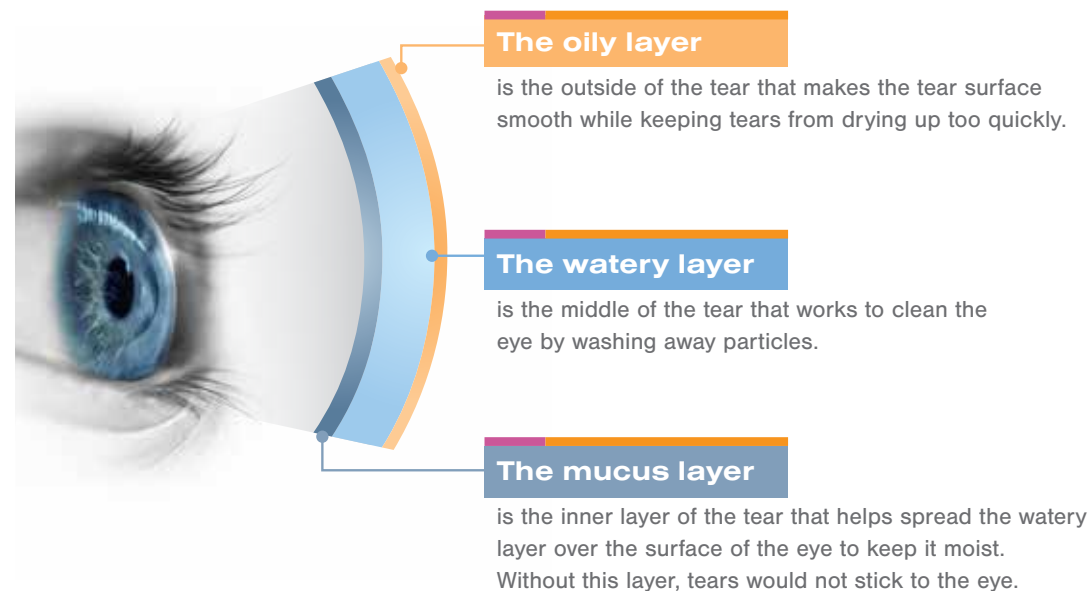
People with dry eye disease don't produce enough tears or the right kind of tears to protect the eye. In addition, inflammation to the surface of the eye may also occur.

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The important role of healthy tears

Healthy tears are necessary for maintaining the health of the eye and for providing clear vision. When you blink, a thin layer of your tears spreads over the front surface of the eye. This keeps the surface of the eye smooth and clear, reduces the risk of infection, and washes away any particles that may be in the eye.

The tear consists of three layers: an oily layer, a watery layer, and a mucus layer. Each of these layers serve a specific purpose.



If there are deficiencies in any of these layers of the tear because your eye does not produce enough tears or your tears do not have the right qualities, it can lead to dry eye symptoms.

Recognize the signs of dry eye

Dry eye disease can be serious and progressive. While there is no cure, it is important to treat dry eye disease and follow your eye doctor's instructions to keep eyes healthy and comfortable. If left untreated, dry eye can lead to pain, damage to the surface of the eye, and in rare cases, some loss of vision.

Since treating dry eye is so important for the health of your eyes, it's crucial to recognize its signs and symptoms. People with dry eye disease may experience:

- Stinging or burning
- A gritty or sandy feeling in their eyes
- Pain and redness
- Heavy eyelids
- Episodes of blurred vision that generally improve upon blinking
- Eye fatigue
- A stringy discharge from the eye
- Episodes of excessive tear production followed by very dry eye periods
- An inability to cry when emotionally distressed
- Uncomfortable contact lenses
- Decreased tolerance for reading, working on a computer, driving at night, or other activities that require long periods of focusing your eyes



Some studies have found that **the burden of dry eye extends beyond physical symptoms.** People with dry eye disease may also find that it affects **their quality of life when it interferes with work and daily activities.**

Understand the cause of dry eye

Risk factors for dry eye disease may include:



Age

People older than 65



Gender

Being female (due to hormonal changes caused by pregnancy, oral contraceptives, or menopause)



Medications

Certain medicines such as decongestants, antihistamines, antidepressants, and blood pressure medications



Medical conditions

Certain diseases and conditions, including rheumatoid arthritis, diabetes, and thyroid problems



Environmental conditions

Not blinking enough while looking at a computer screen, as well as exposure to smoke, wind, and dry climates



Other factors

Refractive eye surgeries, such as LASIK, and long-term use of contact lenses

How dry eye disease is diagnosed

In order to diagnose dry eye disease, an eye doctor (optometrist or ophthalmologist) will conduct a comprehensive eye exam. This exam may include reviewing your medical history to determine what symptoms you are experiencing, general health issues, medications, or environmental conditions that may be affecting your eye health.

Your exam may also include:

- Examining the eyes, eyelids, and the way you are blinking
- Evaluating the eyelids and surface of the eye with a bright light and magnification
- Measuring the quantity and quality of tears

The results of this exam will not only help an optometrist or ophthalmologist determine if you have dry eye disease, but also the best treatment options based on the severity of your dry eyes.



Treating dry eye disease

There are several approaches for treating dry eye disease. No matter which treatment your eye doctor thinks will work best for you, it's important to stick to the recommended therapy to keep your eyes healthy and feeling their best.

The most common methods of treating dry eye include:



Over-the-counter artificial tears

A solution that is similar to your own tears and can be used as often as needed. For most people with mild cases of dry eye, artificial tears work well.



Prescription eye drops

For more severe cases of dry eye, prescription eye drops may be considered by your eye doctor. Unlike artificial tears, which replace tears, these may increase tear production or improve symptoms.



Other treatments

Your eye doctor may use other treatment approaches depending on the severity of your dry eye, such as ointments to reduce inflammation or plugs. Plugs are made of silicone and block tear ducts to help keep your natural tears in the eyes longer.

Discussing dry eye disease with your eye doctor

During your next eye appointment, make the most of the time you have with your eye doctor by having a discussion and asking questions about your dry eye disease. Below are some helpful questions and talking points to address with your eye doctor. Use the notes section on the adjacent page to write down your eye doctor's answers to help you remember the conversation.

Questions for your eye doctor:

- Is dry eye disease serious?
- Why are my eyes tearing and watering if I have dry eye disease?
- What is the best treatment option for me? Do I have more than one choice of treatment?
- How will treatment help my dry eye disease?
- Will treating my dry eye disease cure it?
- How will I know if my dry eye treatment is working for me?

If you experience any of the following, please be sure to share with your eye doctor:

- My dry eyes make night driving more difficult
- Wearing contact lenses has become uncomfortable or painful
- My eyes have become too sensitive to wear eye makeup
- Looking at my computer, phone, and TV screens has become difficult
- I'm embarrassed about my red, burning eyes
- My dry eyes have impacted my quality of life

Notes:

Tips to reduce dry eye symptoms

While an eye doctor can provide you with treatment, there are steps you can take to further reduce your symptoms:



Wear sunglasses when you go outside to reduce your exposure to the sun and drying wind



Drink plenty of water to avoid dehydration (aim for 8 to 10 glasses per day)



Blink regularly while reading or looking at a phone or computer screen



Increase the humidity in the air at home and at work



Consider nutritional supplements that contain essential fatty acids

Talk to your eye doctor today if you think you may be experiencing dry eye or want to learn more about it.