

Dry eyes

Having dry eyes is a very common condition that occurs when the eyes don't make enough tears, or the tears evaporate too quickly. This leads to the eyes drying out and becoming red, swollen and irritated. Dry eye can also be called keratoconjunctivitis sicca or simply **dry eye syndrome**.

What are the causes of dry eyes?

Some possible causes of dry eyes include:

- Hormonal changes
- Ageing – as you get older the body produces less tears and eyelids can't spread tears over the surface of your eyes as well as before
- Exposure to the sun, wind or a dry climate may cause tears to evaporate
- Activities such as reading, writing or working on a computer may mean you blink less often
- Side-effects of some medication
- Laser eye surgery
- Wearing contact lenses
- Medical conditions such as blepharitis, Sjögren's syndrome, contact dermatitis or arthritis.

How can I take care of my eyes?

Taking care of your eyes is a personal responsibility. Dry eyes are usually a chronic condition and although there is no cure there are things that you can do yourself to help your eyes feel more comfortable and ease symptoms. In mild cases self-care may be all you need.

Things you can do include:

- Keeping your eyes clean and maintaining good eyelid hygiene, particularly if you have blepharitis. You can do this using boiled and cooled water and a clean cotton pad or eyelid wipes available over the counter.

- Keeping your eyes protected from wind, dust or other air which can irritate your eyes
- Avoid using eye make-up which can block glands that naturally lubricate your eyes
- Limiting contact lens use to shorter periods, especially if these cause irritation
- Avoiding smoky environments – and stopping if you smoke
- Using a humidifier to moisten the surrounding air and avoiding too much time in places with air-conditioning
- Drinking plenty of water
- If you use a computer for long periods, place your monitor at or below eye level, avoid staring at the screen, and take frequent breaks.

And don't forget to blink, as this helps prevent your eyes drying out.

What are the treatments for dry eyes?

Treatments for treating dry eyes include artificial tears, tear replacement and **ocular lubricants**, usually in the form of eye drops or gels. If, after trying the self-help methods, you still have symptoms of dry eyes then you can try any of the treatments on the following pages.




How to administer eye drops and eye gels:





- Always wash your hands before and after using eye products
- Tilt your head back a little and pull the lower lid of your eye out to form a 'pocket'
- Administer eye drops into the pocket of the eye.
- For gels, apply a thin line of gel along the inside of the lower eyelid.
- Close your eyes for a moment and blink to spread the gel. Try not to rub your eyes. Repeat on the other eye.
- To reduce contamination of the bottle, avoid touching the surface of your eye with the nozzle.

You can buy these treatments from your pharmacy over the counter (OTC) or at the supermarket. Your pharmacist can advise you on which type of eye product is best for you.

Below are the options of the lubricants that can be used in ranking order based on severity of dry eyes from **less** to **more severe**.

Please note that the generic / trade names mentioned are for examples only. There are several brands of manufacturing drops with the same ingredients. We recommend that you request the drops from the pharmacist based on ingredients and not brand names (Pharmacy at Brighton and Sussex Eye hospital NHS Trust and the Sussex Eye Hospital do not have any conflicts of interest in any brand name mentioned below).

Ingredients	Example brands and prices*	Other useful information
<p>Hypromellose eye drops 0.3% or 0.5%</p> 	<p>Generic (£1.49-£3.49)</p> <p>Isopto Plain® (£1.50)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most people can use hypromellose • Use every hour for the first day until your symptoms improve and reduce the number of times you take to 4 times a day.
<p>Carbomer 0.2% gel</p> 	<p>Clinitas® carbomer gel (£3.65)</p> <p>Viscotears® (£5.49)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use 30 minutes before putting in contact lenses • Can be used in the daytime up to 3 times a day (though you might not need it that often) and at night before bed • Can be used for before bed alongside eye drops if eye drops are preferred in the day.
<p>Carmellose 1% PF eye drops</p> 	<p>Celluvisc® £4.99</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply as often as required (up to 6 times a day).

Ingredients	Example brands and prices*	Other useful information
<p>Sodium hyaluronate 0.15% drops</p> 	<p>Blink comfort drops for contact lens wearers 10ml bottle £3.99 20x 0.35ml £6.49</p>	<p>Apply as often as required (up to 6 times a day).</p>
<p>Sodium hyaluronate 0.4%</p> 	<p>Clinitas soothe 20x 0.5ml £6.59</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply as often as required • 30 x re-sealable 0.5ml unit dose. Re-use vial for 12 hours • Preservative-free • Appropriate for contact lens wearers.
<p>Hydroxypropyl guar eye drops</p> 	<p>Systane® £7.99</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply as often as required (up to 6 times a day).
<p>Paraffin-based ointments</p> 	<p>VitA-POS/Hylo Night (5g (preservative free) (£4.95) Xailin Ointment 5g (£4.49)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For night-time application due to blurred vision • Can be administered with other drops in the daytime for any severity of dry eyes.

*price from reputable retail and online pharmacies, correct as of January 2020

Finding an effective treatment can vary between people. If one doesn't work then others can be tried until you find the right one for you. A proper trial of one product would be for at least 6 to 8 weeks. If your symptoms change or worsen then you should see your GP.

Contact details for further information or advice

Sussex Eye Hospital A&E

Phone **01273 664874**

Brighton and Sussex University Hospital

Medicines Information:

Patients helpline: 01444 454388

(Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm)

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The information in this leaflet is for guidance purposes only and is in no way intended to replace professional clinical advice by a qualified practitioner.

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