

Blepharitis

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What is blepharitis?

Blepharitis is inflammation of your eyelids. It can make your eyelids red and puffy and your eyelashes crusty, and make your eyes feel itchy or sore. In severe cases, your lashes may fall out, and you can develop small ulcers or styes as well. It normally affects both eyes.

There are two types of blepharitis.

- **Anterior blepharitis** – this affects the outside front edge of your eyelids (near or among your eyelashes). It may be caused by staphylococcus bacteria infection.
- **Posterior blepharitis (meibomian gland dysfunction)** – this affects the inside rim of your eyelids, just behind your eyelashes.

You may also get blepharitis as a complication of seborrhoeic dermatitis, a common skin condition, which can cause the scalp, face and other areas of the body to become scaly, itchy and red.

Blepharitis is a chronic (long-term) condition. This means that once you have had it, it can come back even after it has cleared up.

Who is affected by blepharitis?

Blepharitis can develop at any age, but is more common in people aged over 50. As you get older, the glands in your eyelids that secrete part of your tears become blocked more easily, and your tears contain fewer lubricants. This makes your eyes can feel gritty and dry.

What are the symptoms of blepharitis?

The symptoms tend to be worse in the morning and you may find your lids are stuck together when you wake up. Other symptoms include:

- itchy, sore and red eyelids that stick together
- crusty or greasy eyelashes
- irritated or burning eyes
- puffy eyelids
- finding contact lenses uncomfortable to wear
- loss of eyelashes
- small ulcers and styes, in severe cases.

How do you treat blepharitis?

Blepharitis cannot be totally cured, but it is possible to make your eyes more comfortable:

- **Warm compresses** – these will help to unblock glands and loosen the crusts on the eyelid so that they are easier to remove. You can buy reusable warming packs which you heat up in the microwave, or you can use a flannel, cotton-wool ball or something similar, which you can soak in hot, but not boiling, water. Place the compress on the edge of your closed eyelids for five minutes, rocking it gently. This will loosen the crusts. Use a separate clean compress for each eye.
- **Lid cleaning** – after applying the compress you should clean your lids. Your optometrist will be able to advise you of the different options available.
- **Lubricants** – these are available from your optometrist or pharmacist and can help if your eyes feel gritty and dry.
- **Antibiotics** – if warm compresses and cleaning your eye lids do not work, your doctor or prescribing optometrist may prescribe you antibiotic ointment or tablets. You may need to take these for several weeks or months and the benefits may last for some months after you finish the treatment.

If you have blepharitis, avoid smoky atmospheres and wearing eye makeup, particularly eyeliner and mascara.