

Frequently Asked Questions About Dry Eye Syndrome

What is dry eye syndrome?

Dry eye syndrome is a common condition that affects millions of Americans - women more often than men. In some instances, it is characterized by dry, irritated eyes due to a lack of lubricating tears. Surprisingly, it can also lead to excessively watery eyes due to tears lacking the proper balance of mucous, water, and oil to coat the eyes properly. Chronic dry eye can lead to damage of the eye's surface, an increased risk of eye infections, and eventually, the inability to produce tears. Left untreated, severe forms of dry eye can even damage your vision.

How do I know if I have dry eye syndrome?

Symptoms of dry eyes may include burning and stinging. A foreign body sensation, like sand being in the eye, is often encountered. Vision can be blurred. Reflex tearing may be triggered causing excessively watery eyes. Sometimes, redness of the eye is experienced. When looking in a mirror, the eyes may seem to have lost their normal clearness and luster.

What causes dry eye syndrome?

Environment

Sunny, dry, or windy weather, heaters, air conditioners, and arid high altitudes increase the evaporation of tears from the surface of your eyes. You may experience dry eye symptoms while viewing television, computer screens, or while reading.

Tear Drainage

If you have too much tear drainage, you may experience dry eye symptoms and related congestion of the nose, throat, and sinuses.

Contact Lens Wear

Contact lens wear increases tear evaporation and related dry eye symptoms. Dryness may result in protein deposits on the lens, eye irritation, pain, infection, or sensitivity to contact lens solutions. Dry eye symptoms are the number one reason people stop wearing contact lenses.

Aging

Tear production gradually decreases with age. At age 65, the tear glands produce about 40 percent of the lubricating tears they produced at age 18. Decreased tear production may cause eye irritation and excess tearing or watery eyes.

Medications

Tear production may be reduced if you take certain medications, including decongestants, antihistamines, oral contraceptives, tranquilizers, and diuretics. If you are taking any medication, ask your doctor if it contributes to your dry eye condition.

Health Problems

Some special health problems can result in side effects of dry eye syndrome, such as arthritis, diabetes, thyroid abnormality, asthma, or an autoimmune condition known as Sjögren's Syndrome, which affects mostly middle-aged women. Also, women experiencing hormonal changes, such as pregnancy or menopause, may contract dry eye.

Can dry eye syndrome affect my ability to wear contact lenses?

Yes. Dry Eye Syndrome is the leading cause of contact lens intolerance or discomfort. Contacts can cause tears to evaporate from the eyes causing irritation, protein deposits, infection, and pain.

How is dry eye syndrome treated?

Common treatment of dry eye syndrome includes the use of artificial tears or artificial tear ointments. Prescription treatment options are available.

Other treatments for dry eye syndrome include the following:

- *Wearing special eyewear, such as goggles or moisture chambers.*
- *Temporary plugs in the tear drain (punctum) to allow the eyes time to gain full use of the lubricating tears before they are drained away from the eye.*
- *Laser treatment or minor surgery to close the punctum permanently.*