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DRY EYES

Dry eyes are a common condition, especially later in life. While there are many underlying causes, it is almost impossible to cure any of them, thus it is a matter of trying to cure the symptoms of dry eyes.

Common conditions that cause clinical dry eye include arthritis and rheumatism, diabetes, menopause, allergies and age.

Most of the tear film is produced by the tear gland, but there are glands on the lids that secrete an oily 'lid' to the tears, helping them to not dry out. It is quite common for these to become blocked (by such things as make-up, or in dry skin conditions such as psoriasis and dandruff) and the 'lid' is lost, allowing the tears to dry out more rapidly than usual.

There are two things that can be done to promote a better tear film 'lid' :

- Using a lid scrub. Lid scrubs can be bought as a pack over the counter. An alternative to a pre-packaged lid scrub is to use baby shampoo and a cotton bud. Boiling some water and letting it cool, until it is tepid and adding a couple of drops of baby shampoo produces an excellent lotion to bathe the lids. Using a cotton bud dipped into this solution, scrub the lid margins once or twice a week to keep the pores clear.

- Using a warm compress. Using a face cloth and quite warm water (obviously not hot enough to scald), massage the eye lids. Make a vertical motion, massaging the lids upward for the bottom lids and downwards for the top lids helps to keep the glands working well.

The use of artificial tears, or lubricating fluids, also helps to keep the eyes moist and functioning well. There are many on the market, we find a product called 'Blink' works well in many cases. This formulation is available to people who wear contact lenses, as well as those that do not. Drops may be available as in a body, or in single-use vials. Single-use vials can be a better option, as they are sterile until opened, and are handy to carry around. Some people find that the bottled artificial tears can sting a little upon insertion as they react to the preservative contained therein.

Some studies also suggest that taking Omega 6 supplements can also aid in dry eye problems.

Tasks that involve staring tend to make the eyes dry out more. For example, watching television, working on computers, driving (especially with heat and/or air-conditioning) can all give rise to the feeling that the eyes are 'scaldy, gritty, sandy'. These tasks can be worse for contact lens wearers who rely on the tears to moisten not only the eye, but their contact lenses as well. Commonly, waking up in the morning can be a difficult time, and then again towards the end of the day. Using a gel at night can make the eyes feel better upon waking in the mornings. Drops should be used when needed (to reduce the discomfort) and also, if it is known that a particular task will make the eyes feel worse, then put the drops in before the task is started (for example, using computers).

In some cases referral for further investigation is the best course of action if the above remedies do not assist enough. This would be either to a private ophthalmologist, or via your family doctor to Waterford Regional Hospital.

So, to recap, clinical dry eye has many causes, none of which we can cure. By trying to cure the symptoms using one or more of the methods described above, it is possible to both improve comfort and also to improve vision, as faulty tears can cause vision to be less good and can also give more glare.