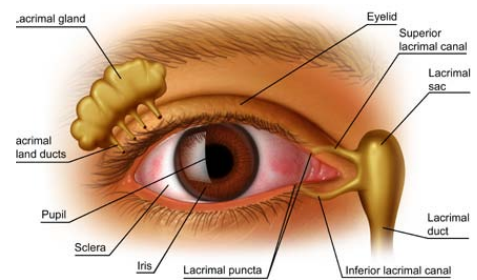


DRY EYE



Dr. Julie Thums

Dry eye syndrome is a chronic lack of sufficient lubrication and moisture in the eye. Its consequences range from subtle but constant irritation to ocular inflammation of the anterior (front) tissues of the eye. In dry eye syndrome, the eye doesn't produce enough tears, or the tears have a chemical composition that causes them to evaporate.



What are the symptoms of dry eye?

Persistent dryness, scratching and burning in your eyes are signs of dry eye syndrome. Some people also experience a "foreign body sensation," the feeling that something is in the eye. And it may seem odd, but sometimes watery eyes can result from dry eye syndrome, because the excessive dryness works to over stimulate production of the watery component of your eye's tears. *Tears are composed of three layers: the outer, oily, lipid layer; the middle, watery, lacrimal layer; and the inner, mucous or mucin layer. Each layer is produced by a different part of the eye (the lacrimal gland produces the lacrimal layer, for example), so a problem with any of those sources can result in dry eyes.*

What can cause dry eye?

Dry eye syndrome has several causes. It occurs as a part of the natural aging process, especially during menopause. It can also be a side effect of many medications, such as antihistamines, antidepressants, certain blood pressure medicines or Parkinson's medications. Living in a dry, dusty or windy climate can also be a factor in dry eye. If your home has air conditioning or a dry heating system that too can dry out your eyes. Another cause is insufficient blinking, such as when you're doing close work for any length of time. Incomplete closure of the eyelids, eyelid disease and a deficiency of the tear-producing glands are other causes, of dry eye. Systemic diseases such as lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, rosacea or Sjogren's syndrome (a triad of dry eyes, dry mouth and rheumatoid arthritis or lupus) have also been linked to dry eyes.

Can dry eye be treated?

Dry eye syndrome is an ongoing condition that may not be cured (depending on the cause), but the accompanying dryness, scratchiness and burning can be managed by increasing lubrication of the eye (tears). But before treating dry eye, you need to find out if that is truly the problem. A diagnosis of dry eye can be determined by your optometrist. If your diagnosis confirms dry eye, your optometrist may prescribe artificial tears, which are lubricating eye drops that may alleviate the dry, scratching feeling, while increasing tear production. Another treatment is the insertion of temporary or permanent silicone lacrimal or punctual plugs to keep the lacrimal (tear) ducts from draining tears away too quickly. If your dry eye condition is being caused by your medications, you will need to consult your doctor regarding discontinuing your usage.

Dr. Julie Thums is an Optometrist at HealthView Eye Care Center-Medford. For more information on Dry Eye, you can contact her at (715) 748-2020 or 866-748-2020.