

# **Tear Dysfunction**

## **(Dry Eyes)**

### **What causes 'Dry Eyes'**

Your eyes produce two types of tears. The first are the watery tears that we are all familiar with if we cry. These are produced in response to emotion or to irritation such as dust that is blown into the eye. The second type of tears is the oily lubricating type that we are not aware of but which is produced constantly in small quantities. This second type of tear acts as a lubricant and coats the surface of the eye with a protective film.

If there are not enough lubricating tears then the eyes can feel sore, burning or gritty. This irritation can sometimes stimulate your eyes to produce the watery tears, so you then have the odd situation that a "dry eye" is causing your eyes to water a lot! So by "dry" we mean that there is not enough of the lubricating oily tears being produced.

### **Treatment**

The standard treatment for dry eyes is to use lubricating drops (artificial tears) and sometimes ointment. Your optometrist will advise you on how often you need to use the drops.

If your eyes get dry overnight it can feel as if your eyelids are stuck together and it may be difficult or uncomfortable to open your eyes in the morning. Using a lubricating ointment before going to bed may help and again your optometrist will be able to advise you. Generally, once the ability to produce the lubricating type of tears is lost, it doesn't return. This means you will need to continue using the drops regularly otherwise the discomfort will return.

After opening, do not use drops or ointment beyond the period specified by the manufacturer. This is to help prevent the drops from becoming contaminated and causing infection.

## Your diet

There is some limited evidence that eating more of certain essential fatty acids (EFAs), especially the polyunsaturated kind, can help reduce dry-eye problems. You could take flaxseed oil or cod liver oil as a dietary supplement, or eat oily fish such as sardines or mackerel 2 or 3 times each week as a natural alternative.



Primary Eyecare  
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## Minor Eye Conditions Service

## Tear Dysfunction

## Patient Information Leaflet

