

Blepharitis and Eyelid Hygiene

Patient information leaflet

What is blepharitis?

Blepharitis is inflammation of the eyelid margins, where the lashes grow. It is very common, it is not an infection you can pass to others, and it is not caused by poor hygiene. It tends to come and go over years rather than disappear permanently, which is why the aim is control rather than cure.

What you may notice

- Red, itchy or sore lid margins, often worse in the morning
- Crusting or flakes along the lashes on waking
- Grittiness, burning or a feeling of sand in the eye
- Watering, or vision that blurs and clears when you blink
- Occasional styes or lid lumps

Why it happens

The lid margin contains meibomian glands, which release the oil that stops your tears evaporating. In blepharitis these glands become blocked and the oil thickens, so the tear film breaks up too quickly and the surface of the eye becomes irritated. Skin conditions such as rosacea and seborrhoeic dermatitis make it more likely.

Daily eyelid routine

This routine is the treatment. Done properly it works; done occasionally it does not. Allow five minutes, twice daily at first, then once daily to maintain.

- Heat. Apply a warm compress or heated eye mask to closed lids for 8–10 minutes. It must stay comfortably hot throughout – a flannel that cools after a minute is not enough.
- Massage. Immediately afterwards, sweep the lid gently towards the lashes with a clean fingertip: downwards on the upper lid, upwards on the lower lid. Ten strokes each.
- Clean. Wipe along the lash line with a lid-cleaning wipe, or cooled boiled water on cotton wool. Clean the base of the lashes, not the eye itself.
- Lubricate. Use preservative-free artificial tears during the day if the eyes feel dry or gritty.

When more is needed

If symptoms persist, treatment may include a course of antibiotic ointment for the lid margin, a short course of anti-inflammatory drops, oral omega-3 supplements, low-dose oral antibiotics for their anti-inflammatory effect, or in-clinic treatments such as gland expression, intense pulsed light or thermal pulsation.

Seek assessment sooner if you develop

- Marked pain, or redness spreading onto the surrounding skin
- Reduced or blurred vision that does not clear on blinking
- A rapidly enlarging or hard lid lump
- A lump that recurs repeatedly in the same spot

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Notes for you from today's consultation