

## Patient information factsheet

# Ingrowing eyelashes

This factsheet has been written to explain what ingrowing eyelashes are and how to treat them. We hope it will help to answer some of the questions you may have. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to a member of our team.

### What is trichiasis?

'Trichiasis' is when an eyelash (or several eyelashes) grows inwards or in the wrong direction. It can cause your eyelashes to rub against the front of your eye, causing pain and irritation.

It can be caused by:

- inflammatory eye conditions that change the direction in which the lashes grow
- injury or previous surgery to the eyelid

Ingrowing eyelashes should not be confused with entropion, which is when the eyelid itself is turned inwards rather than just the lashes. Although both conditions appear similar, they require different treatment. It is possible to have both conditions and if this is the case, you will require a combination of treatments.

### What is distichiasis?

Distichiasis is a rare condition in which you are born with an extra row of eyelashes. In some people, these eyelashes may point inwards and rub against the eye, causing irritation.

### What are the symptoms of ingrowing eyelashes?

Symptoms include:

- red, sore and watery eyes
- a sensation that something is in the eye
- blurred vision

If left untreated, ingrowing eyelashes can cause ulcers, infection or even permanent damage to your sight.

### How are ingrowing eyelashes treated?

If your ingrowing eyelashes are caused by an inflammatory eye condition, such as blepharitis, this will need to be managed first to stop it from happening again. Blepharitis is a condition that occurs when the tiny oil glands near the base of the eyelashes become clogged, causing irritation and redness (inflammation). Years of inflammation can alter the position of the lash roots and cause them to grow in the wrong direction. There is no permanent cure for blepharitis. However, it is possible to control and ease your symptoms using a combination of hot compresses and lid hygiene.

Ingrowing eyelashes can then be treated in a variety of ways depending on how much of the eyelid is affected. We have listed the different types of treatments available on the next page.

## Plucking the eyelashes (epilation)

This can be done by anyone using a pair of eyelash tweezers. Sometimes a relative or friend can help if they are confident about doing this. Alternatively, the practice nurse at your GP surgery or an optician can do this. Many high street opticians are now registered to provide this service free of charge on the NHS. A list of the branches offering this service can be found online or can be accessed via your GP.

Unfortunately, as lashes grow every eight weeks, plucking is usually required on a regular basis. Some people find that after regular plucking, their lashes grow back less often or occasionally not at all.

## Electrolysis

Electrolysis is a more permanent way to treat ingrowing lashes. It is a surgical procedure designed to stop ingrowing lashes from re-growing.

Before the procedure, we will first clean your eyelid and then inject a local anaesthetic to numb it, so you should not feel any pain or discomfort, but you may still feel touch or a sense of pressure. We will then pass an electric current through a fine needle into your lash root to destroy the lash follicle.

This procedure is only suitable when there is a small amount of ingrowing lashes. The procedure can only be done on visible lashes, so if you have recently plucked your lashes, we will wait to schedule an electrolysis appointment when most of them have grown back. The procedure will usually need to be repeated several times (two to three rounds on average) to permanently remove the ingrowing lashes.

## Surgery

If only a small area of your eyelid is affected by ingrowing eyelashes, we may be able to surgically remove the affected area. We can also surgically remove individual eyelashes with a fine metal instrument. However, this is not suitable if a lot of lashes need treating.

If a larger area of your eyelid is affected, we can surgically cut open your eyelid to expose the eyelash roots and then freeze them to stop them from returning. This procedure is called cryotherapy. It may cause your eyelid colour to change and your eyelid edge to look slightly irregular.

Before each procedure, we will first clean your eyelid and then inject a local anaesthetic to numb it, so you should not feel any pain or discomfort, but you may still feel touch or a sense of pressure.

## Are there any risks or side effects of surgery?

- You may experience some mild bruising, swelling and soreness around your eye for a few days, which can be relieved by paracetamol.
- If we use stitches during your surgery, they may rub against your eye or they may come loose and cause the wound to open.
- There is a small risk of infection, so as a precaution we will give you antibiotic drops or ointment to take for a few days after your surgery.
- Sections of your eyelid may look bare or slightly irregular after your lashes have been permanently removed.
- There is a possibility of your ingrowing lashes returning if the roots were not completely removed during your surgery. In this case, you may require further surgery or treatment.

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## Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us.

Southampton eye unit

Telephone: **023 8120 5073**

Email: [uhs.eyearunitadmin@nhs.net](mailto:uhs.eyearunitadmin@nhs.net)

Southampton eye casualty triage line

Telephone: **023 8120 6592** (for the assessment and triage of urgent problems and emergencies only)

## Useful links

[www.nhs.uk/conditions/blepharitis](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/blepharitis)

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For help preparing for your visit, arranging an interpreter or accessing the hospital, please visit [www.uhs.nhs.uk/additionalsupport](http://www.uhs.nhs.uk/additionalsupport)