

Patient information factsheet

Blepharitis

This factsheet has been written to explain what blepharitis is and how it is treated. We hope it will help to answer some of the questions you may have. If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact us using the details at the end of this factsheet.

What is blepharitis?

Blepharitis is a very common eye condition which affects both adults and children. It causes inflammation (redness) and irritation (itching or burning) of the eyelids and occurs when the tiny oil glands near the base of the eyelashes become blocked.

The condition is not usually serious, but it can lead to other problems, such as dry eyes, cysts, conjunctivitis and ulcers, especially if it's not treated.

What causes blepharitis?

Blepharitis can be caused by:

- a sensitivity to a type of bacteria that lives on the skin (staphylococcus)
- a mite infestation
- a malfunctioning of the eyelid oil glands (these glands make the oily part of your tears which helps to keep the surface of the eye protected)

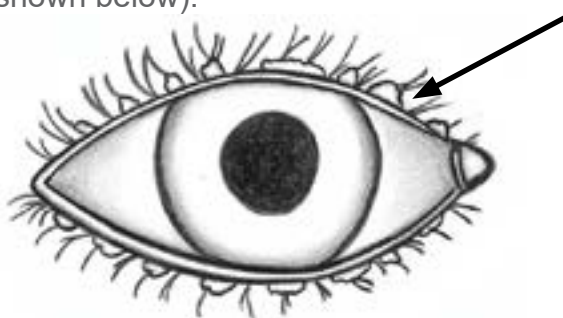
What are the symptoms of blepharitis?

Typical symptoms of blepharitis include:

- inflammation (redness) and irritation (itching or burning) of the eyelids, in particular around the eyelid margin (where the eyelashes grow)
- dry eyes
- watery eyes
- light sensitivity
- foreign body sensation ('something is in my eye' feeling)

Over time, some people may find that their eyelashes start to grow inwards or fall out.

In severe cases of blepharitis, the build-up of oils may look like greasy deposits, flakes or crusts on the eyelashes (as shown below).



What is the treatment for blepharitis?

Your eyelids will continue to produce their natural oils, so there is no permanent cure for blepharitis. However, it is possible to control the build-up of the oil deposits and ease your symptoms using a combination of hot compresses and lid hygiene.

How do I perform lid hygiene?

1. Hot compress and eyelid massage

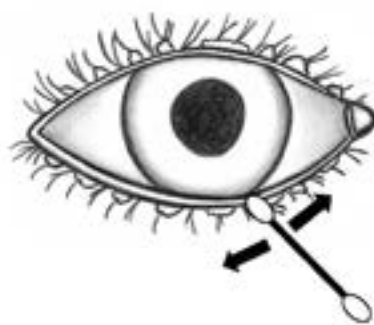
- Soak a flannel in a clean basin of boiled water and leave it to cool to bath temperature.
- Squeeze out the water from the flannel, fold it and hold it over both of your eyes closed.
- Massage your lashes through the flannel in a circular motion until the flannel cools. When this happens, put the flannel back in the hot water and repeat the process for five to ten minutes. This helps to soften the oils on the lashes and squeeze them out of the glands.

You can also buy microwaveable wheat bags designed to be used as hot compresses for blepharitis in most chemists. They are no more effective than using the hot flannel method but some people find them easier to use. If you choose to use a wheat bag, make sure it is not too hot and that the cover is washed after every use to avoid infection. You should also check that you are not allergic to the bag's contents, such as wheat or seeds.

2. Eyelid scrub

After you have carried out the hot compress and massage stage, you will need to remove the loosened oils. The best way to do this is by gently scrubbing your eyelid margin (where the lashes grow) with a cotton bud.

- Pour boiled water into a clean, teacup-sized container and leave it to cool.
- Add one to two drops of baby shampoo or tea tree shampoo. If you are allergic to either of these shampoos, just use water on its own.
- Dip your cotton bud in the water and then, using a mirror in good light, gently scrub the base of your top and bottom lashes with the soaked cotton bud. Make sure to pull the eyelid you are treating away from your eye first, so that you don't poke yourself in the eye.



We will explain how often you need to carry out the treatment. Once your blepharitis improves, we recommend that you carry out eyelid hygiene care on a regular basis (once or twice a week) to prevent your symptoms from returning.

Are there any other treatments for blepharitis?

If you have severe blepharitis that cannot be controlled with lid hygiene, we may prescribe you antibiotics. The antibiotics may come in the form of eye drops or eye ointment, or as tablets, depending on how serious your blepharitis is.

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We may also advise you to follow a variation of these treatments. In this case, please follow the instructions below:

Contact us

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

Non-urgent queries

Eye unit

Telephone: **023 8120 5073** or **023 8120 1429** (Monday to Friday, 8am to 5.30pm)

Email: nonurgenteyeunit@uhs.nhs.uk

Urgent queries

Eye emergency department triage line

Telephone: **023 8120 6592** (Monday to Friday, 8am to 7.30pm and weekends and bank holidays, 8am to 6pm)

If you have any concerns outside of these hours, go to your nearest emergency department.

Useful links

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**