

Patient Information – Accident and Emergency

Blepharitis

What is blepharitis?

Blepharitis is a common condition that causes inflammation (irritation) of the eyelids leading to red rimmed, sore eyes, sometimes with crusting at the roots of the eyelashes. It is extremely common, responds well to simple treatment and, for most people, it is not harmful. Symptoms include red and sore eyelids, tiny flakes like dandruff at the bottom of the eyelashes, the feeling that there is something in the eye, dry or burning eyes and sometimes blurring of the vision.

What causes blepharitis?


It is more common in people who have skin conditions such as eczema and acne, and more common in those with allergic diseases like asthma. Eyelids contain tiny glands that make an oil that keeps the eyes moist. In blepharitis, these glands become blocked, which causes irritated eyelids and dry sore eyes. In some cases, dandruff like flakes build up at the base of the eyelashes. It is thought that, in some people, blepharitis is partly caused by sensitivity to the bacteria (staphylococcus) which normally live on the skin.

Treatment

The most important treatment is good eye care, known as “lid hygiene” and this should be used twice daily even when the symptoms are not there to prevent the condition causing further problems.

- Warm compress: Boil some water and let it cool a little or use water from the hot tap. Water should be hot but not hot enough to burn. Soak cotton wool or a clean flannel in the water, wring it out and gently press onto your closed eyelids for two to three minutes at a time. This melts the oily secretion blocking the openings of the glands and softens any lash flakes.
- Massage your eyelids by gently rolling your first finger over them in a circular motion or running the length of your finger up and down the eyelids towards the eyelashes. This helps to push out the oil from the tiny eyelid glands.

Use a moistened cotton bud to gently clean the inside/back edge of your eyelids then more firmly scrub off any flakes on the base of your eyelashes. This is best done in front of a mirror.



The cotton bud may be moistened in tap water or you can make up a cleaning solution as below:

- Add one teaspoon of baby shampoo to one cupful of cooled previously boiled water, or
- Add a 1/4 of a teaspoon of sodium bicarbonate to a 1/2 a cupful of cooled previously boiled water.

Mix thoroughly and store the covered solution in the fridge for up to one week.

The doctor or nurse may prescribe antibiotic drops or ointment, artificial tear drops and, occasionally, antibiotics by mouth or steroid eye drops.

Complications

Blockage of the glands can lead to a chalazion or meibomian gland cyst, leaving a round, painless swelling sometimes with discolouration underneath the eyelid. Sometimes these can be red and sore to start with. Most disappear within a few months without treatment. To help the cyst to go, warm compresses can be used (see above).

Much less commonly, blepharitis can lead to changes on the clear window of the front of your eye (the cornea), which will usually require further treatment and a check-up.

Further check-ups

In most cases, your eye doctor will discharge you straight from casualty. Some people are prone to blepharitis and may need to continue lid hygiene for some time or even indefinitely.


When to seek advice:

If your eye becomes increasingly red or painful, your sight becomes more blurred or you develop very noticeable and spreading redness together with a lot of swelling of the eyelids, you should telephone Moorfields Eye Hospital Direct for advice on 020 7566 2345 or attend your local A&E department or the Moorfields 24/7 A&E department which is open for emergency eye problems **only** for a further examination.

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Revision number: 2
Approved: August 2014
Review date: August 2015

**Moorfields Eye Hospital NHS
Foundation Trust**
City Road, London EC1V 2PD
Phone: 020 7253 3411
www.moorfields.nhs.uk

Moorfields Direct advice line
Phone: 020 7566 2345
Monday to Friday, 9am to 4.30pm,



for information and advice on eye conditions and treatments from experienced ophthalmic-trained nurses.

Patient advice and liaison service (PALS)

Phone: 020 7566 2324 or 020 7566 2325

Email: pals@moorfields.nhs.uk

Moorfields' PALS team provides confidential advice and support to help you sort out any concerns you may have about the care we provide, guiding you through the different services available at Moorfields. The PALS team can also advise you on how to make a complaint.

Your right to treatment within 18 weeks

Under the NHS constitution, all patients have the right to start their consultant-led treatment within 18 weeks of being referred by their GP. Moorfields is committed to fulfilling this right, but if you feel that we have failed to do so, please contact our patient advice and liaison service (PALS) who will be able to advise you further – see above for contact details. For more information about your rights under the NHS constitution, please visit www.nhs.uk/choiceinthenhs.