Blepharitis

Fact sheet

Blepharitis is a non-contagious eye condition that occurs when the glands around your eyelashes become blocked or infected.

Mild blepharitis is a common eye complaint affecting as many as one in three people across the UK. However, some patients suffer an acute form of the condition, which can be extremely painful and result in loss of eyelashes, swelling inside the lid and disturbed vision.

Blepharitis has a tendency to re-occur so chronic sufferers are advised to take preventative action to minimise any discomfort.

What is blepharitis?
Blepharitis is an inflammation of the eyelid that occurs when the glands around the eye lashes become blocked or infected as a result of an allergic reaction or a bacterial infection.

Blocked glands lead to an excess production of oil which in turn creates a favourable environment for bacteria to grow.

There are three types of blepharitis:

- **Posterior blepharitis** affects the glands behind the lashes
- **Anterior blepharitis** affects the glands at the base of the lashes
- **Combination blepharitis** affects the glands behind and at the base of the eyelid.

Suffers may experience symptoms in one or both eyes.

People who suffer from dandruff or dry skin conditions seem to be particularly prone to the condition. Older people and women are also at increased risk although the condition can affect anyone at any age.

Causes and symptoms
Often there is no single identifiable cause of blepharitis. It is often associated with a low grade staphyloccocal infection. Chemical fumes, smoky atmospheres and other pollutants can all aggravate the condition and

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cosmetics can block glands if you do not follow a hygienic beauty regime.

Symptoms include:

- redness and scaly skin around the rims of the eyelids
- crusty or sticky eyelashes
- swollen eyelids
- itching and burning eyelids
- a granular sensation when blinking
- loss of eyelashes
- ingrowing eyelashes
- occasional eye pain

Diagnosis
Your local optometrist (optician) can quickly and easily diagnose blepharitis and prescribe a course of treatment.

Treatment
To ease symptoms cleanse the affected eye(s) using a warm compress. Gently place a cotton wool ball that has been dipped in warm (boiled - not boiling!) water onto the infected eye(s) and relax for 30 seconds. Repeat this several times a day.

Lid-scrubs are highly recommended and can be done in a couple of different ways...

1. Pre-packaged lid-scrub pads are now available from opticians and many pharmacists;
2. Alternatively, take a 1/4 teaspoon of Sodium Bicarbonate (baking soda) and mix with small tumbler of boiled water that has recently cooled. Dip

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a cottonwool bud into the solution and scrub the edges of both upper and lower lids. This should be done at least once, at night-time and if possible, in the morning too.

Remember treatment can sometimes take 2 or 3 weeks to work, so perservere!!

In severe cases an antibiotic ointment or eye drops may be used to help minimise symptoms and relieve discomfort. There are several good over-the-counter remedies available from your pharmacist. Whilst suffering from blepharitis it is advisable to avoid wearing make-up.

Contact lens wearers may also find their lenses less comfortable whilst they have the condition and may find it more comfortable to wear a pair of spectacles whilst they are treating it.

Always seek professional advice from your local optometrist if your vision becomes blurred, swelling develops or you suffer from a prolonged attack.

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The Eyecare Trust is a registered charity that exists to promote awareness of all aspects of eye health. For more information call our public information line on 0845 129 5001 or log on to www.eyecaretrust.org.uk

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