

Dry eye: symptoms, types and home care

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In short

Dry eye happens when your tears do not keep the front of your eye comfortable and protected. It is common, and it is usually managed over the long term. Daily home care helps many people, and an assessment shows what is driving your symptoms.

Common symptoms

- Dry, gritty or burning eyes
- Red or tired eyes
- Watery eyes
- Blurry vision that clears when you blink
- Sensitivity to light or wind

Watery eyes can be a sign of dry eye. An irritated eye surface makes extra watery tears to compensate.

Types of dry eye

Your tears have a watery layer with a thin oily layer on top.

- **Evaporative dry eye.** The oil glands in your eyelids are blocked or not working well. This is called meibomian gland dysfunction. Tears dry out too quickly. This is the most common type.
- **Aqueous-deficient dry eye.** Your eyes make too little of the watery part of tears.
- **Mixed.** Many people have a bit of both.

Things that can make it worse

- Long screen sessions, because you blink less
- Air-conditioning, heaters, fans, wind and smoke
- Some medicines, such as antihistamines, some antidepressants and some blood pressure medicines
- Some health conditions, such as thyroid problems or rheumatoid arthritis

Home care

- 1 Use a warm compress on your closed eyelids each day. See our [warm compress and lid massage guide](#).
- 2 Clean your eyelid edges gently with lid wipes or a cleanser your optometrist recommends.
- 3 Use lubricating eye drops as advised, after the warm compress.
- 4 During screen work, look away every 20 minutes and blink fully a few times.
- 5 Point air vents and fans away from your face.
- 6 Wear wraparound sunglasses outdoors on windy days.
- 7 If you take regular medicines, ask your doctor whether any could add to dryness. Keep taking them until you have spoken to your doctor.

When to book a dry eye assessment

Book an assessment if home care has not helped after a few weeks, if drops help for only a short time, or if your contact lenses feel uncomfortable.

We use an Antares dry eye analyser. It looks at your blinking, measures how stable your tear film is, and images the oil glands in your eyelids. You also fill in a short symptom questionnaire. The results help your optometrist plan your care.

Options may include lubricating drops, prescription eye drops, in-clinic gland expression and **IPL treatment**. Our optometrist is therapeutically endorsed, so can prescribe eye drops where needed.

When to call us on (03) 9702 9118

- Your eye is red and painful
- Your vision is blurry and does not clear with blinking
- You have a discharge from your eye
- Symptoms are getting worse despite home care

Call (03) 9702 9118

⚠ Go to the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital emergency department (32 Gisborne Street, East Melbourne, open 24 hours), or call 000, if

you have severe eye pain, sudden loss of vision, or a chemical splash in the eye. For a chemical splash, rinse the eye under cool running water for 15 to 20 minutes first.

To book a dry eye assessment, [book online](#) or call us on (03) 9702 9118.

FAQs

— Why are my eyes watery if I have dry eye?

When the eye surface becomes dry and irritated, it makes extra watery tears. These tears lack the oil that helps them stay on the eye, so they run off.

— Are eye drops from the chemist enough?

Lubricating drops help many people with mild symptoms. If you need them often,

or they help only briefly, an assessment can show the cause.

— What happens at a dry eye assessment?

Your optometrist asks about your symptoms and health, then uses the Antares analyser to measure your tears and image your eyelid glands. The scans do not touch your eye.

— Does screen time cause dry eye?

Screen use makes us blink less often and less fully. That can make dry eye symptoms worse.
