

Understanding dry eye syndrome

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The Tribune, (Health and Fitness) New Delhi, Wednesday, November 16, 2005.

Dry eye syndrome is a chronic insufficiency of moisture in the eye. Its consequences range from subtle but constant irritation to severe disturbance in day to day activity.

Tears moisten the eyes. They are much more than just water. They're a complex mixture of water, fatty oils, proteins, electrolytes, bacteria-fighting substances and growth factors. This mixture helps make the surface of your eyes smooth and clear. Without it, good vision is impossible.

Symptoms

Symptoms of dry eyes may include:

- A stinging, burning or scratchy sensation in your eyes
- A sense of a sand grain in your eyes
- Strings of mucus in or around your eyes
- Eye fatigue after short periods of reading
- Feel better with eyes closed

Causes

Dry eye syndrome has several causes. For some people, the cause of dry eyes is an imbalance in the composition of their tears. In others its insufficient tears to keep the eyes comfortably lubricated. Medications and environmental factors, also can lead to dry eyes.

The common causes for dry eye syndrome include

1. Common cause is living in a dry, dusty or windy climate.
2. As a part of the natural aging process, especially during menopause.
3. As a side effect of many medications, such as antihistamines, antidepressants, certain blood pressure medicines and birth control pills.
4. Another cause is insufficient blinking, such as when you're staring at a computer screen all day.

5. Dry eyes are also a symptom of systemic diseases such as lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, rosacea or Sjogren's syndrome.

6. Long-term contact lens wear is another cause.

7. Certain eye conditions may cause eyes to feel dry and scratchy, like in blepharitis, an inflammation along the edge of the eyelids.

Treatment

For most people who have dry eyes, it's a chronic condition. The goal of treatment is to make the symptoms as less as possible.

Effective treatment begins with a careful examination to determine which factors may be causing your symptoms. The goal of treatment is to keep your eyes moist. This can be done in a couple of ways:

Artificial tears: These are lubricating eye drops that may reduce the dry, scratching feeling.

Preserving tears: This can be done by partially or completely closing the tear ducts, which normally serve to drain tears away. The closure conserves both your own tears and artificial tears you may have added.

Medications: Dry eyes caused by problems with the meibomian glands and blepharitis generally respond to specific treatment for the same.

Self-care

Simple care at home can make these patients feel better, like

- **Avoid direct air currents.** Don't direct hair dryers, car heaters, air conditioners or fans toward your eyes.
 - **Wear protective glasses while going out.**
 - **Use home humidifiers.** In winter, a humidifier can add moisture to dry indoor air. Some people use specially designed glasses that form a moisture chamber around the eye, creating additional humidity.
 - **Remember to blink.** While working on computers, consciously blink .It helps spread your own tears more evenly.
 - **Avoid rubbing your eyes.**
 - **Cold compresses.** Gives soothing feeling to the patient with dry eyes.
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