

# Dry & Watery Eyes



It is important to appreciate that dry eyes may actually be the cause of watery eyes and so the two conditions can be interlinked. Furthermore, there are many causes of dry eyes and these can also co-exist and even make each other worse! Therefore there is sometimes no “magic bullet” treatment and instead, therapy often needs to be directed at ALL aspects to get any meaningful improvement in symptoms. It is also worth bearing in mind that these conditions are often chronic, and therapy is therefore long-term and must be frequent and consistent, particularly for the first few months to give the eyes, eyelids and surrounding structures their best chance to improve and regain normal function.

## Most People Do Not Need To See A Specialist

Whilst your optometrist can diagnose and treat most aspects of dry eyes, occasionally treatment is challenging or there is a specific anatomical cause such as a droopy lower lid (think of a gutter hanging away from the roof and the rain spilling over the edge) or a blocked tear duct (think of your roof’s downpipe being blocked by leaves) and these conditions are sometimes referred to us for specialist input at Nelson Eye Surgeons.

We at Nelson Eye Surgeons recognise that although dry/watery eyes are rarely sight threatening, they can certainly be a cause of significant discomfort and/or inconvenience. However, rest assured with time, perseverance and a few tricks, symptoms can often be brought under control even if it is sometimes not possible to fully eradicate them.

For those patients who have tried all of the following advice without success, please first consult your optometrist who will be able to exclude or treat other conditions (e.g. allergy) and will be able to manage most dry eye conditions. If your optometrist cannot get on top of the symptoms, or feels that assessment at Nelson Eye Surgeons could benefit you, we would be happy to accept an optometrist referral with view to trying to help you to manage your dry eye condition. However it is worth noting that medications and surgery tend to be a last resort due to risks/side effects.

## So What Should I Do?

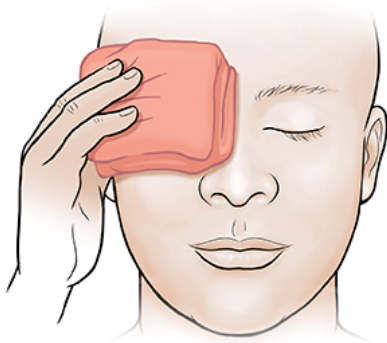
The following measures are aimed at alleviating dry eye symptoms (and in many cases the associated watery eyes caused by reflex tear overproduction). Please be aware that success may not come immediately, nor as a complete resolution of symptoms and that it is **normal** for eyes to water in the cold, wind, when using heat-pumps or if blink frequency is significantly reduced as it is when performing visual tasks requiring prolonged concentration (e.g. driving, TV, ipad/kindle/tablet, reading books, using computers etc).

### Hot Compresses

Diligent twice daily warming of eyelids for 3 months is well recognised as one of the best ways of treating dry/watery eye problems. It feels pleasant to do and is a natural treatment that will help you avoid medications or surgery. Not only does the heat open the eyelid glands (“meibomian glands”) that help natural oils coat your tear film, it also helps to turn stagnant, toothpaste-like secretions into those with a consistency closer to olive oil. There are many ways of warming eyelids but the best way to ensure success is to make it simple and enjoyable (and not for it to feel like a chore). Make it a twice-daily routine alongside brushing your teeth, heat a facecloth under a HOT tap (but be careful not to scald yourself), squeeze out excess water and hold the cloth gently over both closed eyes...

## Hot Compresses (continued)

...until it goes cool – a few minutes should be ample, and repeat if required. There is no need to put pressure on the eyes.



...previously mentioned activities that reduce blinking and exacerbate drying of the eyes (reading, driving, computers etc).

## Eyelid Hygiene

This is a treatment aimed at reducing the build-up of waste from normal skin bacteria and mites that can live in your lashes. Gently washing or wiping your eyelids near to where the lashes emerge from the skin once or twice a day using dilute baby-shampoo or a tea-tree oil based wash can be helpful. There are many commercial preparations that you can obtain at your optometrists or pharmacies.

## Lubricant Drops

Artificial tears can help to wash out irritants and moisturise and protect the surface of the eye. *“But doctor, why do I need lubricants if my eyes are always watering?!”* – this is a frequently asked question and the answer lies in the fact that excessive watering is often your body’s way of trying to resolve dry eye issues. Most lubricant drops come in preserved and a non-preserved forms. Preservatives are rarely problematic but occasionally they can irritate the surface of your eye, particularly if you use other eye drops regularly (e.g. for glaucoma), or need to use the artificial tears excessively for comfort. Many people ask which drops are best - a little trial and error is needed before settling on a drop that is both comfortable to use and that is also not prohibitively expensive. Preservative free drops are seen as the gold-standard in lubricant eye drops but they can be costly. When deciding on frequency of use it is important to note that if symptoms cause you to reach for your drops, you are probably under-treating yourself (i.e. allowing the dryness to occur before applying the drops). It is best to pre-empt the symptoms with frequent drops *even when you don’t feel as though your eyes are dry*. This is especially important before performing those...

## Dietary Supplements

Vitamin D and A deficiencies are occasionally associated with dry eye symptoms. Vitamin A is easy to get from your diet and we are lucky to have plenty of sunshine here in Nelson (this converts cholesterol to Vitamin D). Most people in our region have diets with plenty of fresh fruit, vegetables and oily fish. However, if you feel you may be deficient in any of these, you may wish to consider dietary supplementation (Vitamins A, D and omega-3 oils). Flax seed oil has also been reported to be of benefit. It is a good idea to check with your GP first to ensure that you have no contraindications to any supplements.

## Ocular Decongestants

Beware: although these medications are easily available on the shelf at pharmacists, drops such as Naphcon-A, ClearEyes, Naphzoline and Albalon have no role in the treatment of dry eyes and often contain components that can cause irritation when used in the frequencies needed to treat dry eyes. For this reason, Nelson Eye Surgeons do not recommend these treatments.