

## Blepharitis and lid hygiene

### Other formats

If you need this information in another format such as audio tape or computer disk, Braille, large print, high contrast, British Sign Language or translated into another language, please telephone the PALS desk on 01271 314090.

### What is blepharitis?

Blepharitis is inflammation (swelling) of the eyelid margin. This is the part of the eyelid at the base of the eyelashes. The eyelids may become red and crusty and the eyes can become dry due to oil glands in the eyelids becoming blocked. You may notice some dandruff like material on the eyelids.

### What causes blepharitis?

The cause of blepharitis is not completely understood. However, it is thought to arise from the normal skin bacteria causing inflammation, or due to the skin being unusually dry or flaky. This leads to blockage of the oil glands from a buildup of flaky skin on the eyelid margin. It can be associated with acne, eczema or dry eyes.

### What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of blepharitis include:

- a gritty feeling in the eyes
- dry eyes
- excessive watering of the eyes
- soreness and discomfort of the eye lids

### How is it diagnosed?

Blepharitis can be diagnosed by the following eye care professionals:

- Ophthalmologist
- Optometrist
- Orthoptist
- Nurse

It is diagnosed by looking at the eyelids using a type of microscope called a slit lamp as part of an eye exam.

## How is it treated?

Blepharitis cannot be cured. However, with good lid hygiene the symptoms can be reduced and the swelling can be managed.

### Lid hygiene

Lid hygiene can be done using the technique below or, alternatively, you may be able to purchase over-the-counter products such as eye cleansing wipes/pads and creams to clean the eyelids, as well as heated pads to use in place of the conventional warm compress.

This can involve two stages:

1. Warm compress. Use a clean flannel or cotton pad.
  - a. Hold the pad under warm/hot running water
  - b. Squeeze out the excess water
  - c. Hold the warm flannel/pad against your closed eyelids until it starts to cool down
  - d. Repeat steps a to c above. You will need to reheat the flannel/pad regularly to keep the eyelids warm.
  - e. The compress should be done for 1 to 2 minutes in total.
2. Lid cleaning. Use a clean cotton bud and a clean cup or bowl.
  - a. Boil some water and pour it into a clean cup or bowl. Set aside and leave to cool.
  - b. Get a clean cotton bud and dip it into the cooled boiled water.
  - c. **Lower eyelid:** with the cotton bud pointed toward your eye, pull the lower eyelid down. Whilst looking up, sweep the cotton bud along your eyelid just behind the eyelashes from your nose to the outer part of your eye.
  - d. **Upper eyelid:** swap the end of the cotton bud and dip this in the sterile water. Look down. Point the cotton bud to your nose and rest this against your upper eyelid behind the eyelashes. Brush side to side whilst lifting the cotton bud upwards, like putting on mascara.
3. Lubricants. You may also be prescribed eye lubricants to help soothe the discomfort and improve the symptoms of dry eye. These should be used regularly throughout the day. It may be more soothing if the drops are refrigerated.
4. Antibiotic eye drops may be used if you have very swollen lids or evidence of a bacterial infection in the eyes.
5. Omega 3 oil and flax seed oil are thought to be beneficial. These can be taken by mouth and may help with dry eye symptoms.

## Possible effects of treatment

Improved symptoms.

## What is the prognosis or expected outcome of treatment?

It will likely take a couple of weeks of good lid hygiene before you start to notice an improvement in your symptoms.

## Are there any possible complications?

If left untreated blepharitis can cause damage to the front surface of the eye (cornea) and can affect your vision.

Untreated severe blepharitis can lead to developing styes and swelling of the oil glands in the eye called meibomian cysts (chalazion).

## Follow-up

In most cases, follow-up is not required. In more severe cases, you may be seen 4 to 6 weeks after starting lid hygiene.

## Further information

If you have any questions, please ask a member of the eye care team.

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust  
Raleigh Park  
Barnstaple  
Devon EX31 4JB

Switchboard: 01271 322577

### Useful websites:

<http://blepharistreatment.org.uk/blepharitis-treatment/>

## References

Blepharitis treatment [online] Available at: <http://blepharistreatment.org.uk/blepharitis-treatment> [Accessed 17/01/2017]

What is blepharitis? AAO. [Online] Available at: <https://www.aao.org/eye-health/diseases/what-is-blepharitis> [Accessed 17/01/2017]

Blepharitis. NHS choices (2016) [online] Available at: <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Blepharitis/Pages/Introduction.aspx> [Accessed 17/01/2017]

## **PALS**

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern call 01271 314090 or e-mail [ndht.pals@nhs.net](mailto:ndht.pals@nhs.net). You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple.

## **Have your say**

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust aims to provide high quality services. However, please tell us when something could be improved. If you have a comment or compliment about a service or treatment, please raise your comments with a member of staff or the PALS team in the first instance.

'Care Opinion' comments forms are on all wards or online at [www.careopinion.org.uk](http://www.careopinion.org.uk).

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust  
Raleigh Park, Barnstaple  
Devon EX31 4JB  
Tel. 01271 322577  
[www.northdevonhealth.nhs.uk](http://www.northdevonhealth.nhs.uk)

© Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust  
This leaflet was designed by the Communications Department.  
Please contact 01271 313970 to help us improve our leaflets