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Blepharitis

Patient Information:

Blepharitis is an inflammation of the eyelids. It usually affects the edges (margins) of the eyelids. It is not usually serious, but may become an uncomfortable, itchy problem. Blepharitis is typically chronic (persistent). Unfortunately the exact cause is not known.



Symptoms

Typical symptoms are itch and discomfort of the eyelids. The eyelids may look inflamed or greasy. You may find it difficult to open your eyes in the morning. Sometimes tiny flakes or scales appear on the eyelids which look like fine dandruff and crusts may develop at the base of the eyelashes.

Sometimes the eyelids also become infected. The eyelids may then become sore and more inflamed.

One or more of the tiny glands of the eyelids may become blocked and fill with a mucus-like fluid. The glands may also become infected which can cause a sty. Some people with blepharitis also make fewer tears of poorer quality than normal. This may lead to dry eyes which can cause the eyes to feel gritty and sore.

Disclaimer

The information provided in this document is intended as a useful aid to general practitioners, optometrists and patients. It is impossible to diagnose and treat patients adequately without a thorough eye examination by a qualified ophthalmologist, optometrist or your general practitioner. Hopefully the information will be of use prior to and following a consultation which it supplements and does not replace.

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What is the treatment for blepharitis?

There is no one-off cure as the inflammation tends to recur. However, symptoms can usually be eased with regular treatment. Regular eyelid hygiene is the most important part of treatment and prevention. The treatment aims to loosen and then remove the crusts which form around the base of the eyelashes.

Add a pinch of bicarbonate of soda (or a teaspoon of baby shampoo) to a tumbler of warm, previously boiled, tap water.

Clean eyelid and lashes using cotton wool dipped in this cleaning solution.

Wipe along the lash line using a cotton bud dipped in the cleaning solution.

If ointment has been prescribed, apply this to the lid margins after cleaning. In some cases, a course of antibiotic tablets for 3 or more months may also be necessary, but it is important to still clean the lashes as above.

You should carry out lid hygiene twice a day until symptoms settle. When the symptoms have gone, try and continue lid hygiene once a day at night to help prevent further flare ups.

Artificial tear eye drops will also help if you develop dry eyes.