

WHAT IS BLEPHARITIS?

Blepharitis is a common and persistent inflammation of the eyelids. Symptoms include irritation, itching, and occasionally, a red eye.

This condition frequently occurs in people who have oily skin, dandruff, or dry eyes. Blepharitis can begin in early childhood, producing “granulated eyelids,” and continue throughout life as a chronic condition, or develop later in life.

Bacteria reside on the surface of everyone’s skin, but in certain individuals they thrive in the skin at the base of the eyelashes. The resulting irritation, sometimes associated with overactivity of the nearby oil glands, causes dandruff-like scales and particles to form along the lashes and eyelid margins.

For some people the scales or bacteria associated with blepharitis produce only minor irritation and itching, but in others they may cause redness, stinging, or burning. Some people may develop an allergy to the scales or to the bacteria which surround them. This can lead to a more serious complication, inflammation on the eye tissues, particularly the cornea.

TREATMENT

There is no cure for blepharitis, but it can be controlled through a regular program of hygiene. First you should obtain the necessary equipment:

- A concave or cosmetic mirror (available in most drug stores)
- Cotton balls, a clean washcloth, or commercial lint free pads
- Q-tips
- A mild baby shampoo which doesn’t sting the eyes or a commercial eyelid cleansing solution
- A small, clean glass or jar

The cleansing routine below should be followed at least twice a day at first; perhaps less often as the condition improves.

1. Take a clean washcloth, wet it with warm water, wring it out and place it over your eyelids for 5 minutes. This will help soften the crusts and loosen oily debris. Re-wet as necessary to maintain the desired temperature.
2. If you are not using a ready made eyelid cleansing solution, prepare your own by filling the small glass jar with 2-3 ounces of warm water and adding three drops of baby shampoo.
3. Moisten a cotton ball, clean cloth, or lint free pad in the solution and then gently scrub the eyelids for about two minutes. Your eyes should be closed as if you were sleeping.
4. Looking into the magnifying mirror, gently use a q-tip moistened in the cleaning solution to brush the scales away from the eyelids. You can brush either in a horizontal or vertical direction, as long as the granular debris trapped in the eyelashes is effectively loosened and removed. This procedure should take approximately half a minute for each eyelid.
5. Thoroughly rinse your eyes with cool tap water and dry gently with a clean towel.

6. Discard any cleansing solution left in the small glass and rinse it clean.
7. If medication had been prescribed, it should be applied to the eyes and/or eyelids along the lashes, following your ophthalmologist's instructions.

WILL MEDICATION HELP?

Many medications are available for the treatment of blepharitis, including antibiotics and steroids (cortisone) preparations in drop or ointment form. While cortisone medications often hasten relief of symptoms, long-term use can cause some harmful side effects.

Once the acute phase of the condition is overcome - which can take several weeks - milder medications, if any, may be helpful to control your blepharitis. However, medications alone are not sufficient; the daily cleansing routine described above is essential.

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