



Blepharitis

Overview

Blepharitis (blef-uh-RYE-tis) is inflammation of the eyelids. Blepharitis usually involves the part of the eyelid where the eyelashes grow and affects both eyelids.

Blepharitis commonly occurs when tiny oil glands located near the base of the eyelashes become clogged. This leads to irritated and red eyes. Several diseases and conditions can cause blepharitis.

Blepharitis is often a chronic condition that is difficult to treat. Blepharitis can be uncomfortable and may be unsightly. But it usually doesn't cause permanent damage to your eyesight, and it's not contagious.

Symptoms

Blepharitis symptoms and signs include:

- Watery eyes
- Red eyes
- A gritty, burning or stinging sensation in the eyes
- Eyelids that appear greasy
- Itchy eyelids
- Red, swollen eyelids
- Flaking of the skin around the eyes
- Crusted eyelashes upon awakening
- Eyelid sticking
- More frequent blinking
- Sensitivity to light
- Eyelashes that grow abnormally (misdirected eyelashes)
- Loss of eyelashes

When to see a doctor

If you have blepharitis symptoms and signs that don't seem to be improving despite good hygiene — regular cleaning and care of the affected area — make an appointment with your doctor.

Causes

The exact cause of blepharitis isn't clear. It may be associated with one or more factors, including:

- Seborrheic dermatitis — dandruff of the scalp and eyebrows
- A bacterial infection
- Clogged or malfunctioning oil glands in your eyelids
- Rosacea — a skin condition characterized by facial redness
- Allergies, including allergic reactions to eye medications, contact lens solutions or eye makeup
- Eyelash mites or lice

Complications

If you have blepharitis, you may also experience:

- **Eyelash problems.** Blepharitis can cause your eyelashes to fall out or grow abnormally (misdirected eyelashes).
- **Eyelid skin problems.** Scarring may occur on your eyelids in response to long-term blepharitis. Or the eyelid edges may turn inward or outward.
- **Excess tearing or dry eyes.** Abnormal oily secretions and other debris shed from the eyelids, such as flaking associated with dandruff, can accumulate in your tear film — the water, oil and mucus solution that forms tears. Abnormal tear film interferes with the healthy lubrication of your eyelids. This can irritate your eyes and cause symptoms of dry eyes or excess tearing.
- **Difficulty wearing contact lenses.** Because blepharitis can affect the amount of lubrication in your eyes, wearing contact lenses may be uncomfortable.
- **Sty.** A sty is an infection that develops near the base of the eyelashes. The result is a painful lump on the edge (usually on the outside part) of your eyelid. A sty is usually most visible on the surface of the eyelid.
- **Chalazion.** A chalazion occurs when there's a blockage in one of the small oil glands at the margin of the eyelid, just behind the eyelashes. The gland can become infected with bacteria, which causes a red, swollen eyelid. Unlike a sty, a chalazion tends to be most prominent on the inside of the eyelid.
- **Chronic pink eye.** Blepharitis can lead to recurrent bouts of pink eye (conjunctivitis).
- **Injury to the cornea.** Constant irritation from inflamed eyelids or misdirected eyelashes may cause a sore (ulcer) to develop on your cornea. Insufficient tearing could predispose you to a corneal infection.

By Mayo Clinic Staff

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