

Patient information

Blepharitis and Eyelid Hygiene

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If your first language is not English, we can arrange for an interpreter to be available. Please let us know in advance if you require this service.

What is Blepharitis?

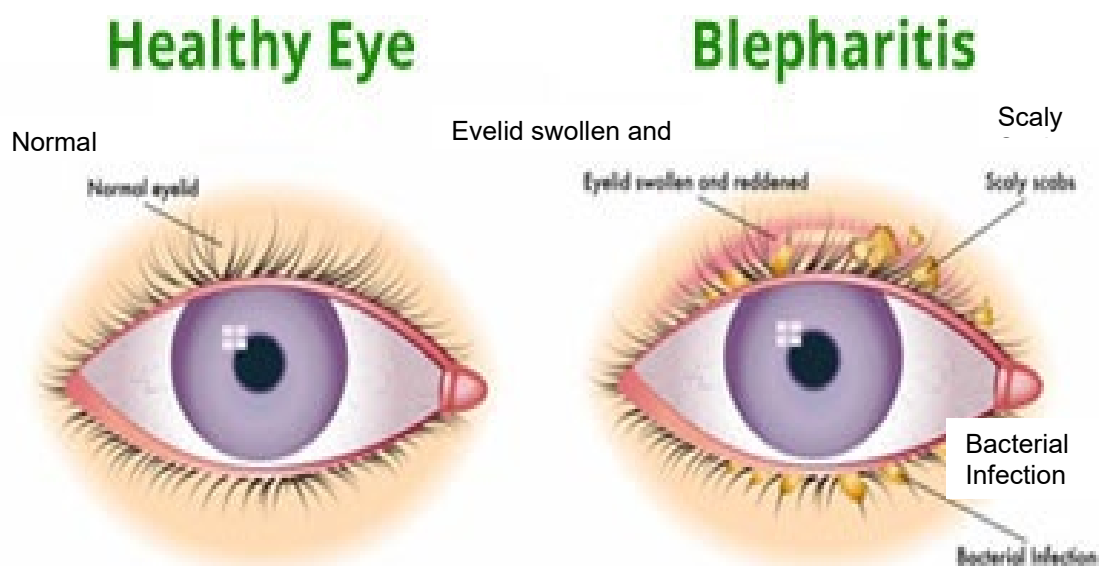
Blepharitis is an inflammatory condition that affects the edges (margins) of the eyelids and usually causes itching and irritation. It usually affects both eyes and it can occur at any age. Although blepharitis may be uncomfortable, it is not a sight-threatening condition.

What are the symptoms?

Blepharitis may cause one or more of the following:

- Itchiness around the eyes
- Persistent irritation or 'burning' sensation
- Redness and swelling of the eyelid edges
- Tiny skin flakes on the eyelashes
- Crusting of the eyelids, especially in the morning
- Eyelid cysts / styes
- Sensation of 'grit' in the eye
- Redness of the eye

Symptoms may come and go. It is common to have flare ups or long periods with no symptoms.



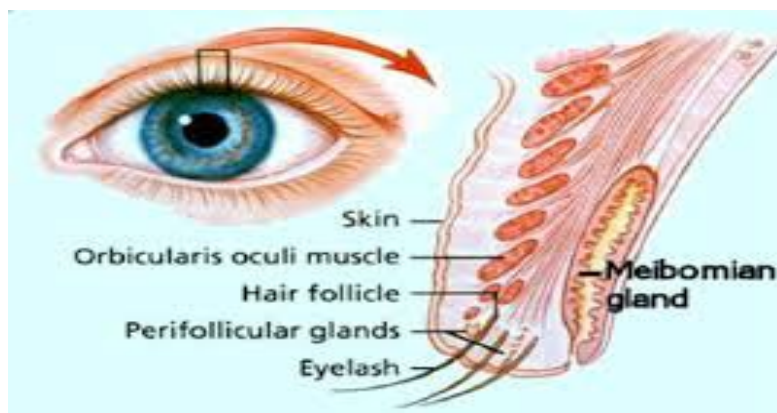
What are the causes?

Blepharitis may be due to a combination of one or more of the following:

A disorder of the Meibomian (oil) glands at the edge of the eyelids: Normal tears of the eye are made up of three layers - an oily (lipid) layer, a watery (aqueous) layer and a sticky (mucous) layer.

There are Meibomian glands inside the eyelids with openings onto the edges of the eyelids (lid margins) which naturally produce oil. This oil stops the watery element of the tear film from drying out. At times the Meibomian glands become blocked; this leads to the tear film breaking down and 'evaporative' dry eyes.

A build up of crusts around the eyelashes, which the body's own bacteria reacts to: the Meibomian glands may also produce excess oil which clogs the lashes causing **skin disorders such as acne rosacea, which leads to red and inflamed skin, and scalp dandruff (seborrheic dermatitis).**



How long will it last?

Blepharitis is a persistent condition, but the symptoms can come and go. There is no one-off cure, but it is possible to control and manage blepharitis with a simple eyelid hygiene regime (treatment).

Is it serious?

No. Although blepharitis can be uncomfortable for the sufferer, it rarely causes problems to the eye itself.

Is it an infection?

No, but there may be over-activity of normal skin organisms. These germs (bacteria and occasional fungi) flourish in debris/secretions that build up on the edge of the eyelids. This is why regular cleaning of the eyelids is important.

What is the treatment?

Regular eyelid cleaning

The treatment of blepharitis involves the regular cleaning of the eyelids and lashes to remove the irritating substances.

The aim of regular cleaning of the eyelids and lashes is to soothe the eyelids, unblock the Meibomian glands and remove any stagnant oily secretions.

The main points of regular eyelid cleaning are:

Warmth: Warmth is used to break down the oil in the Meibomian glands and softens the skin and any crusts attached to the eyelids. The most successful method is a reusable bag device which can be heated in the microwave (ensure you are heating according to manufacturer's instructions). These can be purchased from any pharmacy). The other method is a hot flannel, but this needs to be constantly re-warmed in hot water to be effective. It should be applied for 5-10 minutes.

Massage: Massage should be done immediately after applying the warmth. With clean hands, massage along the length of the eyelids towards the ear (massage upper lid down and the lower lid up) with the eyes closed using comfortable pressure. Massage for 30 seconds and repeat 5–10 times after warming the eyelids. This helps to push the oil out of the glands.

Clean: Clean the eyelids following the warming and massage. Clean the eyelid edges with a clean cotton ball moistened with a bicarbonate of soda solution or a baby shampoo solution. Alternatively, ready-made eyelid cleaning wipes may be used, which can be obtained from any chemist. Use a side to side motion to remove the debris from the eyelid edges and eyelashes, starting at the tear duct and working out to the temple.

It may take up to six weeks for the symptoms of blepharitis to improve once the eyelid cleaning regime has begun, so perseverance is essential.

Eyelid cleaning should be performed twice a day, morning and evening, until the symptoms have settled. When the symptoms have gone, performing eyelid cleaning once a day, every day, may prevent further flare-ups.

Bicarbonate of Soda solution

Boil some water, and then let it cool to room temperature.

Pour 100 mls (1/4 pint) of the water into a clean container.

Dissolve one level teaspoon of bicarbonate of soda (not baking powder) in the water. Use as explained under 'Clean' above.

Discard this solution immediately after use.

Baby shampoo solution

Boil some water in a kettle.

Pour 100 mls (1/4 pint) of water into a clean container.

Allow the water to stand until it is warm, and then mix two or three drops of baby shampoo into the water. Use as explained under 'Clean' above.

Discard solution immediately after use.

If you have any problems or questions about your treatment, please ask one of the Eye Clinic Nurses.

Further Advice

- Wearing eye make-up, particularly eyeliner, may make symptoms worse. It is best to avoid eyeliner, particularly during a flare-up of blepharitis.
- Rubbing your eyelids may make the inflammation worse, so try to avoid doing this.
- As mentioned above, blepharitis commonly develops in people with seborrheic dermatitis, rosacea or dry eye syndrome. If relevant, treatment of these other conditions may also help to ease symptoms of blepharitis.
- There is some evidence to suggest a high diet in omega-3 fats can help to improve blepharitis.

The best sources of omega-3s are oily fish, such as:

- Mackerel
- Salmon
- Herring
- Fresh or frozen tuna – not canned, as the canning process sometimes removes the beneficial oils.

Aim to eat at least two portions of fish a week, one of which should be oily fish.

Flaxseed oil Capsules can also be taken as an alternative source of omega-3.

When taking omega-3 fats, it has been stated that it can take between 6 to 12 months to see a definite effect.

- Preservative-free lubricating eye-drops (artificial tears) may help alleviate the symptoms of blepharitis but will not cure it. It is important that the lubricating eye-drops taken are preservative-free, as the preservative contained in most well-known brands can result in further eye irritation. Speak to a high-street pharmacist for further guidance.

Contact information

If you are unsure whether you have blepharitis or another eye condition, please consult an optician or your GP. You may also obtain advice by calling 0300 131 4500 extension 771744 (Mondays to Fridays between 09:00am and 05:00pm).

Important information

The information in this leaflet is for guidance purposes only and is not provided to replace professional clinical advice from a qualified practitioner.

Your comments

We are always interested to hear your views about our leaflets. If you have any comments please contact the Patient Experience Team – on 0300 131 4731 or by email at: esh-tr.patientexperience@nhs.net

Hand hygiene

The trust is committed to maintaining a clean, safe environment. Hand hygiene is very important in controlling infection. Alcohol gel is widely available for staff use and at the entrance of each clinical area for visitors to clean their hands before and after entering.

Other formats

If you require any of the Trust leaflets in alternative formats, such as large print or alternative languages, please contact the Equality and Human Rights Department.

Tel: 0300 131 4434 Email: esh-tr.accessibleinformation@nhs.net

After reading this information are there any questions you would like to ask? Please ask your nurse or doctor.

Reference

Reviewed by: Paul Russell (Staff Nurse, Ophthalmology)

The following clinician(s) have been consulted and agreed this patient information: Mr. Manuel Saldana (Consultant Ophthalmologist and Clinical Governance Lead for Ophthalmology Department), Mr. Michael Wearne (Consultant Ophthalmologist).

The directorate group that have agreed this patient information leaflet: Ophthalmology Department, Diagnostic, Anaesthetic and Surgery division (DAS)

Next Review Date: September 2025
Responsible Clinician/Author: Ophthalmology Department (ESHT)

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