

Do You Suffer from Dry Eye?

Written by David "Drew" Hunter, MD

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Do you suffer from fluctuating vision that clears with blinking, or often experience burning, redness, itching, excessive tearing, blurry vision, tired eyes or contact lens discomfort? If so, you may be suffering from Dry Eye. Dry Eye is a disease that affects millions of people and occurs when you cannot produce enough natural tears to keep your eyes moisturized, or when tears evaporate too quickly.

CAUSES

The two main causes of Dry Eye are commonly referred to as Aqueous Deficient or Evaporative Dry Eye. Aqueous Deficiency is when the lacrimal glands fail to produce enough of the watery component of tears, resulting in low tear volume. Lipid Deficient Dry Eye, also known as Evaporative Dry Eye, is a disorder from inflammation or clogging of the Meibomian (oil) glands at the base of the eyelashes in the eyelid causing tear film break-up and evaporation. Of the millions of people suffering from Dry Eye, 86% have some level of Meibomian Gland Disease (MGD). You may suffer from either Aqueous Deficiency, MGD or a combination of both, but your treatment must be targeted at the cause of your dry eyes in order to best to treat your symptoms. The easiest way to get properly diagnosed is by consulting your vision care provider.

Dry Eye can also be caused by medications that include, but are not limited to: antihistamines, nasal decongestants, blood pressure medicines, birth control pills, antidepressants or even Glaucoma eye drops. Common causes for Dry Eye include pregnancy or hormone replacement therapy, the natural aging process and years of strain on your eyes from staring at computer or video screens. While the list goes on, healthcare professionals stress that the best way to catch Dry Eye is through regular visits to your vision care provider. Not only can Dry Eye cause severe symptoms but it also puts the surface of the eye at risk for other complications.

TESTING

Once you make an appointment with your vision care provider, they may decide to test you for Dry Eye, causing one of many things may take place. You may go through Tearlab Osmolarity Testing which measures the osmolarity of your tears, you may complete Inflammadry Testing to check for inflammatory component, --- or you may participate in Keratograph Imaging which is a picture that evaluates the tear meniscus and gives a detailed view of the Meibomian glands.

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Each of these tests can lead to the underlying cause of your dry eyes. Based on your testing and clinical exam, your vision care provider will work with you to determine the best treatment plan to control your symptoms and protect the surface of your eyes. There are many vision care providers in the Beaufort county area, but SunGate Medical Group is known for their Dry Eye Center of Excellence, making them the optimal team to visit when suffering from Dry Eye.

TREATMENT

Dry eye can easily be treated in a variety of painless ways. There are three main pieces of the puzzle that need to be addressed to care for Dry Eye: the watery part of the tear film, the oils, and surface inflammation. Artificial teardrops, gels and ointments are the first line treatment, but for more severe Aqueous Deficiency, you may need more advance treatment like Plasma Drops. Patients with MGD may need treatment like LipiFlow, which is the only FDA approved treatment that unblocks your Meibomian glands and restores natural oil production and gland function. Lipiflow is an in-office treatment that not only restores function, but also helps prevent further damage to your oil glands. Other prescription medications may be needed to support your eyes and control the inflammation on the surface.

If you believe you suffer from Dry Eye, call Dr. Hunter or Dr. Farr at SunGate Medical Group at 843-310-4368 to schedule your evaluation.

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