

# Blepharitis and glaucoma

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## Blepharitis and glaucoma

### Definition

Blepharitis is a common inflammatory condition of the eyelids. It is not a sight threatening condition and it is readily detected during a routine eye examination.

### Incidence / age

Blepharitis may occur at any age, and often occurs without any symptoms.

### Causes

Blepharitis is caused by an overgrowth of the bacteria that normally live on the eyelids and skin. The secretions that are produced by glands in the eyelid form tiny flakes and scales that can irritate the eye. Blepharitis can occasionally be associated with skin conditions, such as rosacea; also various chemical irritants, medications or certain eye drops - including glaucoma drops - may cause blepharitis.

### Symptoms

Usually both eyes are affected. Typically the following eye symptoms may be experienced: itchiness, grittiness, red eyelid margins, crusting / scaling of the eyelid margins, dry eye symptoms. Symptoms are frequently worse in the morning. Occasionally an ulcer of the cornea or lid margin may develop, but this is relatively uncommon. Treatment generally prevents such a problem. The eyelids often appear red and swollen to some degree with crusty skin at times on the very margin of the lids. The margins of the lids specifically can often appear quite red and inflamed. Symptoms can persist to some degree despite treatment, however mostly improves with the appropriate lid hygiene. The condition can wax and wane ie vary from month to month.

### Conditions associated with blepharitis

In blepharitis, the eyelid glands that normally release oil onto the surface of the eye tend to get clogged up. This affects the quality of the tear film. As a result, patients with blepharitis often experience dry eye symptoms.

Some eyelid glands also can block off completely, and in this situation a cyst forms. This may require surgical intervention, to drain the cyst.

Corneal ulcers may arise and these require urgent treatment. In such a situation treatment usually leads to a rapid improvement.

Blepharitis may also lead to long term changes to the eyelid. The eyelid margin may become slightly irregular and notched in more severe cases.

### Treatment

Treatment for blepharitis is based on a stepwise approach depending on its severity. For mild blepharitis, the first two measures in particular are important:

#### (1) Warm compresses

Soak a face cloth in warm water and apply to closed lids for 5-10 minutes, rewarming the facecloth repeatedly. This simple measure is often very effective in relieving symptoms, and should be performed on a daily basis for 2 weeks.

#### (2) Lid cleaning

Initially, you should bathe your eyelids twice daily, as follows:

Make up a solution with a few drops of baby shampoo in a teacup of boiled water. Allow to cool. After washing your hands, clean the lid margins with the solution to remove dry crusts. If you have fairly steady hands this may be done by using cotton buds. Care must be taken to clean the front of the eyelids (where the eye lashes are) and not to touch the white part of the eye. Lid cleaning should be performed on a daily basis for 2 weeks, and may be required less frequently on a long term basis.

The use of cotton buds for blepharitis: use each cotton bud once and discard. Use cotton buds dipped in warm previously boiled water. Several cotton buds may be required for each lid. Do not clean inside the lids, do not touch the white of the eye. The best mixture to use is boiled water with a teaspoon of baby shampoo ("no tears").

#### (3) Eye drops / antibiotics

Soothing artificial tears can help the symptoms of blepharitis just as they help the symptoms of dry eyes. These may have a more soothing effect if they are refrigerated. In more severe cases, antibiotic ointment application to the eyelid margins may be helpful.

A course of oral antibiotics may sometimes be recommended for persistent blepharitis that fails to respond to other measures.

#### (4) Other treatments

Occasionally, if the associated dry eye problem is significant, the tear duct openings can be plugged with 'punctal plugs'. Laboratory investigations such as bacterial cultures may be required to identify specific causes.

It is particularly important to persevere with treatment as bathing the lids can easily be forgotten. Sometimes it can take weeks for symptoms to improve.

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