

# Blepharitis

(blepharo: eyelid; -itis: inflammation)

Blepharitis is a chronic malfunction and inflammation of the oil-producing glands in the eyelids.

There are 3 components to the tear film: oil, water and mucous. These 3 layers must be in balance to have normally functioning tears. Without proper combination of secretions, the tear film breaks down and becomes unstable. This causes itching, burning, grittiness and occasionally a red eye. This unstable tear film can also cause intermittent blurring of the vision. The eyes may feel dry or watery depending on the consistency of the tears. Sometimes the eyes may overflow with watery tears as the body tries to "flush" out this gritty sensation. Rarely, problems such as ulcers or scars in the cornea can be caused by blepharitis.

Blepharitis can begin as early as childhood, producing crusting of eyelids, styes, and, rarely, damage to the surface of the eyeball. For some children, it may continue throughout life, or in others may gradually resolve. Blepharitis can also start later in life and may be related to menopause or aging. They can also be associated with dry eye, which will worsen symptoms.

Blepharitis is not an infection, but it reduces the eye's ability to fight bacteria and secondary infections, or severe bacterial overgrowth may occur in some cases.

***\*In general blepharitis is a life-long condition that is never completely cured but is treatable.\****

## SYMPTOMS OF BLEPHARITIS

- Redness of eyelids and eyes
- Tearing
- Itching, burning, gritty sensation
- Intermittent blurry vision that improves with blinking or tear drops
- Loss of eyelashes
- Crusting and scales on lashes
- Eyelid, white lid bumps and styes

## STYES AND EYELID BUMPS

Oily build up at the lid margin can seal the opening of the ducts and cause little white lumps that look like whiteheads. Hot/warm compresses and gentle lid massage to "milk" the glands can restore flow through the pores. When glands become completely blocked they swell and may rupture and leak fatty debris into the lid. These leakages are toxic and create redness, swelling, pain and pus. This is not an infection but certainly appears to be one.

Styes will go away if left completely alone, but they can last over a year. Compresses are the first line of treatment. Incising and draining a stye may speed up the healing process.

# Treatments for Blepharitis

- **Warm compresses:** Any of the following compresses may be used; warm damp facecloth, hot packs, microwavable hot pad, rice in a sock heated in the microwave. Place on eyes for at least 5 minutes. This should be as warm, as you can tolerate without burning your eyelid. Repeat 1-5 times/day.
- **Massage:** Massage is also recommended along with warm compresses as it helps get the fluids flowing. GENTLY massage with a Q-tip or clean finger toward eyelid margin.
- **Lid scrubs/shampoos:** This is used for crusting and matting of the eyelashes. This can be done several times/week. This helps clear the lids of oily build-up. Warm water and a couple drops of baby shampoo with a cloth can be rubbed along the lash line and rinsed. Sometimes the symptoms may worsen initially as the toxins are released. Lubricant drops may be used after to rinse away toxins. Proper removal of eye makeup is also important.
- **Eyelid wipes:** Tea tree oil (Cliradex) is an all-natural preservative free eyelid and facial cleanser wipe. It can be used to clean lids and remove oily build-up.
- **Lubrication:** There are many types of lubricants due to the tremendous variation in patients. There is always a period of trial and error to find which one works for you. These are to be used on a frequent basis. Preservative free lubricants, such as Hylo or Bion tears, can be used more often (up to hourly). A humidifier can also provide relief and may be used at bedtime.
- **Dietary supplements:** Omega fatty acids may also be helpful such as: flax seed oil, fish oils. Omega swirl for kids is a supplement of omega-3 that tastes like a smoothie. (This can be found at most health stores, such as Community Natural Foods)
- **Prescription medications:** Topical antibiotics or oral antibiotics may be prescribed by your ophthalmologist or family physician. Prescription medications require monitoring. If your medication includes a steroid, it can have long term side effects such as glaucoma cataracts. Make sure regular appointments are scheduled, in most cases with be 1-6 months. Oral antibiotics should **NOT** be used if you know or think you may be pregnant.