

Dealing with dry eye - more common than you think

They say the eyes are the window to the soul, but did you know eyes also say a lot about your health? A number of eye ailments are limited to the eye, but often they can be an indicator of a systemic problem. Dry eye - a common condition in which the tear ducts make insufficient tears for lubricating and nourishing the eye - can be either.

Tears are necessary for maintaining the health of the front surface of the eye and for providing comfortable and clear vision. People with dry eyes either do not produce enough tears or have a poor quality of tears.

Each blink of the eyelids spreads tears across the front surface of the eye. Tears provide lubrication, reduce the risk of eye infection, wash away foreign matter in the eye, and keep the surface of the eyes smooth and clear.

Common symptoms of dry eye

The Schepens Eye Research Institute, an affiliate of Harvard Medical School, estimates that 40-million Americans are affected by dry eye and associated ocular surface diseases. The prevalence of dry eye increases with age, yet despite its prevalence, dry eye remains under diagnosed.

People with dry eye may experience symptoms of irritated, gritty, scratchy or burning eyes, a feeling of something in their eyes, excess watering and blurred vision. Advanced dry eye can even damage the front surface of the eye and impair vision.

Common causes of dry eye

Dry eye has many causes, including Meibomian Gland Dysfunction (MGD), which accounts for approximately 70 percent of cases. The meibomian glands are located in the eyelids, and secretions from these glands are crucial in preventing rapid tear evaporation. Failure to produce or secrete oil will affect the quality and stability of the tear film, resulting in dry eye symptoms.

Contact lens wearers are particularly susceptible to dry eye as soft lens materials require additional lubrication, and a balanced tear film is vital to successful lens wearing. Additionally, medicated eye drops may exacerbate dry eye in contact wearers. Up to 50 percent of contact lens wearers discontinue use due to discomfort often caused by dry eye, according to estimates from the Review of Cornea and Contact Lenses.

During the winter months, many experience dry eye as humidity levels drop and home heating systems activate, resulting in drier air. This often causes tears to evaporate more quickly. Additional factors leading to dry eye include medications that can reduce the amount of tear produced in the eye, medical conditions such as diabetes or rheumatoid arthritis and refractive eye surgeries, such as LASIK, which can cause decreased tear production.

Diagnosing dry eye

An eye care professional can diagnose dry eye through a comprehensive eye examination, including testing with special emphasis on the evaluation of the quantity and quality of tear production. Testing may include a review of the patient's history to evaluate dry eye symptoms, any health problems, medications being taken or any environmental factors that could be causing dry eye, according to the American Health Journal. Your doctor will perform an external examination of the eye to check the structure of the eyelid and the quality and composition of your tears.

Managing dry eye

Many doctors and patients reach for an eye drop to provide immediate, but temporary, dry eye relief. Inflammation is a hallmark of dry eye, and reducing inflammation on the surface of the eye and regulating the glands that produce tears are essential to effectively manage dry eye. However, inflammation is a systemic process and needs to be addressed from within the body. Artificial tears and rewetting drops may offer temporary relief, but this only alleviates the symptom. Eye vitamins, such as EyePromise EZ Tears, attack the cause instead of the symptom, and provide rapid dry eye relief by reducing inflammation and improving tear composition.

Leading eye care professionals agree that dry eye is a common and often chronic problem, but one that can be effectively managed. Don't continue to suffer from dry eye, consult with your doctor about an exam, or to learn more about dry eye supplements or vitamins.

