Moorfields Eye Hospital NHS Foundation Trust

Patient information

Blepharitis

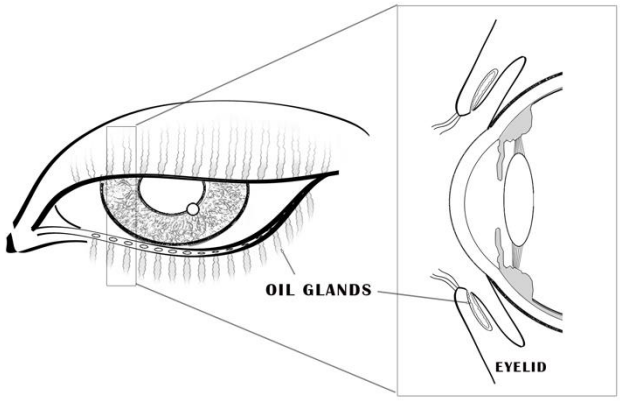
What is blepharitis?

Blepharitis is a common condition that causes inflammation (irritation) of the eyelids, leading to red rimmed, sore eyes, sometimes with crusting at the roots of the eyelashes. It is extremely common, responds well to simple treatment and, for most people, it is not harmful. Symptoms include red and sore eyelids, tiny flake like dandruff at the bottom of the eyelashes, dry or burning eyes and sometimes blurring of the vision. You might also have the feeling that there is something in your eye.

What causes blepharitis?

There is no direct cause of blepharitis but it is more common in people who have skin conditions such as eczema and acne, and in those with allergic diseases like asthma. Eyelids contain tiny glands that make an oil which keeps the eyes moist as part of the tear film (see figure 1)

Figure 1



In blepharitis, these glands become blocked, which causes irritated eyelids and dry, sore eyes. It is thought that in some people, blepharitis is partly caused by sensitivity to the bacteria (staphylococcus) which normally live on the skin.

Treatment with lid hygiene

The most important treatment is good eye care, known as “lid hygiene” and this should be done twice daily with clean hands. This includes even when the symptoms are not there, to reduce the severity and frequency of the symptoms. The aim of lid hygiene treatment is to encourage healthy tears to lubricate the eye and reduce inflammation. This is achieved by softening the oils in the eyelid glands,

unblocking the glands and removing any flakes or excess bacteria.

Step by step guide: lid hygiene techniques

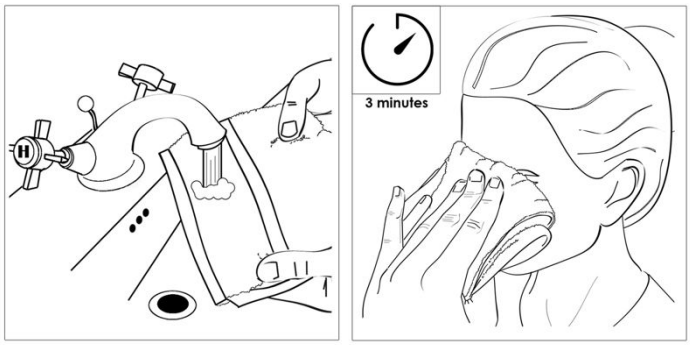
Below is a step by step guide of how to perform these techniques effectively. Please ensure any contact lenses are removed first.

For a video demonstration of these techniques please search 'lid hygiene' on Moorfields Eye Hospital YouTube channel or visit: www.youtube.com/watch?v=oHODzr9l3MA

1. Soften oils with hot compress

Hold a hot flannel or microwavable eye bag firmly onto closed eyelids for **3 minutes** to soften the oil in the glands. Take care not to burn your skin (see figure 2 below for guidance).

Figure 2



2. Unblock oil glands with massage

This should always be done immediately after step 1. The aim is to apply pressure to the eyelids to clear the softened oil out of the glands, ready to be cleaned away.

- Use your index finger to apply pressure to the eyelid whilst slowly rolling it towards the eyelashes (see figure 3 below).

Figure 3

OR

- For the upper lid, look downwards and either pinch the eyelid between your forefinger and thumb applying pressure between them, or press with your forefinger against the white of the eye. Perform the opposite for the lower lid.

3. Clean edges of eyelids

Moisten a cotton bud with tap water (see next page figures 4 and 5), or use commercially available eyelid wipes (see figure 6) to clean the edges of the eyelids gently but firmly, both where the eyelashes come out of the skin (figure 4) and behind the eyelashes (figure 5). To clean behind the lashes, you will need to pull the eyelid away from the eye with your finger. This aims to remove any flakes or crusting from the base of the eyelashes, as well as cleaning away excess oils and bacteria.

Figure 4

Figure 5

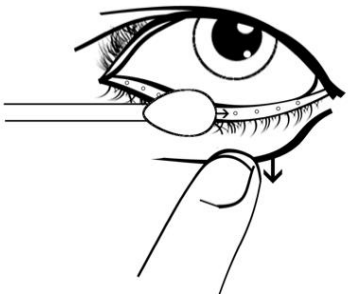


Figure 6

Other treatment options:

Your doctors, optician or pharmacist may advise you on other types of treatment available.

The treatments listed below should only be used as recommended and are not covered in this leaflet:

- lubricant eye drops (artificial tear drops).
- antibiotic eye drops or tablets.
- anti-inflammatory drops such as steroids or ciclosporin.

Possible complications

Blockage of the oil glands can lead to a meibomian cyst or chalazion, which leaves a round painless swelling in the eyelid. The blocked gland can get infected and become red and sore. To help treat the cyst, use the warm compress treatment as per steps 1and 2 in this leaflet as early as possible. Less commonly, blepharitis can lead to changes on the clear window of the front of the eye (cornea). This will usually require further treatment and a check-up.

When to seek further advice

If your eye becomes increasingly red or painful, your sight becomes more blurred or you develop very noticeable and spreading redness together with a lot of eyelid swelling, you should call Moorfields Direct for advice on 020 7566 2345 or attend your local A&E department. Alternatively, you can attend Moorfields A&E department in City Road for a further examination (open 24/7 for emergency eye problems only).

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Phone: 020 7253 3411
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Moorfields Direct telephone helpline

Phone: 020 7566 2345
Monday-Friday, 8.30am-9pm
Saturday, 9am-5pm

Information and advice on eye conditions and treatments from experienced ophthalmic-trained nurses.

Patient advice and liaison service (PALS)

Phone: 020 7566 2324/ 020 7566 2325
Email: moorfields.pals@nhs.net
Moorfields' PALS team provides confidential advice and support to help you with any concerns you may have about the care we provide, guiding you through the different services available at Moorfields. The PALS team can also advise you on how to make a complaint.

Your right to treatment within 18 weeks

Under the NHS constitution, all patients have the right to begin consultant-led treatment within 18 weeks of being referred by their GP. Moorfields is committed to fulfilling this right, but if you feel that we have failed to do so, please contact our patient advice and liaison service (PALS) who will be able to advise you further (see above). For more information about your rights under the NHS constitution, visit www.nhs.uk/choiceinthenhs