



Live Well, Work Well

Left undiagnosed or untreated, dry eye syndrome can lead to cornea damage.

VISION CARE: DRY EYE SYNDROME

Dry eye syndrome occurs when your eyes don't produce enough tears, or when the quality of the tears produced is poor. Tears must maintain a precise balance of mucus, water, oil, nutrients, proteins, and antibodies in order to function properly. With age, the glands in the eyelids produce less oil, which allow tears to evaporate quickly and leave the eyes too dry.

Causes

Dry eye syndrome can be caused by any of the following factors:

- The natural aging process
- Diseases, including diabetes
- Hormonal changes, especially after menopause
- Prescription medications, including some high blood pressure medications, antihistamines, diuretics, antidepressants, sleeping pills, and pain medications
- Non-prescription medications, including some cold and allergy products
- Environmental conditions such as hot, dry, windy, or high-altitude climates
- Exposure to pollutants like smoke
- Activities that keep one from blinking for long periods, like reading, using a computer, or watching TV
- Contact lens use
- Eye surgery, including LASIK

Symptoms

The most common symptoms of dry eye syndrome include:

- Excessively watery eyes
- Eyes that produce a stringy mucus-like discharge
- Red or irritated eyes that burn and itch
- Foreign body sensation in the eyes
- Vision that becomes blurred after periods of reading, watching TV, or using a computer

Diagnosis

Your eye doctor can check for dry eye syndrome by examining your eyes and measuring your rate of tear production and evaporation. The doctor can also check for pinpoint scratches on the front surface of the eye caused by dryness.

Treatment

- Artificial teardrops can generally be used as often as needed, from a few times per day to every few minutes.
- Special lid-cleaning techniques or antibiotics in the case that infection, eyelid inflammation, or clogged oil glands, are contributing to dry eye syndrome
- Humidify the air in your home
- Eye plugs may enable your eyes to make better use of the few lubricating tears produced

