

Combatting Chronic Dry Eyes: How To Bring Back The Moisture

By: *Providence Health Team*

It may have started as a gritty feeling. Your eyes were red, itching, with that awful “something-in-your-eye-sensation.” Maybe it progressed to blurry vision or sensitivity to light. If this has gone on for a while and is growing worse, you may have [dry eye syndrome](#). This can be a troublesome condition for people of any age or physical fitness level. Even Jennifer Aniston famously lives with chronic dry eyes.

What causes it?

Many things can cause or worsen dry eye syndrome. The most common issues include:

- An imbalance in the tear-flow system
 - Medical conditions, such as rheumatoid arthritis, diabetes, and thyroid disease
 - Side effects from medication
 - Environmental conditions, such as air conditioning, wind, or smoke
 - Long-term use of contact lenses and refractive eye surgery, including LASIK procedures
 - Natural aging (Most people over age 65 experience some eye dryness.)
- Depending on the cause, dry eye syndrome may not be completely curable, but treatment can ease the symptoms and may improve your vision.

How is it treated?

Your doctor may recommend various treatments. Options range from over-the-counter artificial tear solutions to eye drops that reduce inflammation or increase natural tear production to plugs or surgery that block the tear ducts. Luckily, there are effective ways to find relief on your own, too.

How can I relieve dry eye symptoms at home?

If your symptoms are mild, you may be able to reduce the irritation by following these steps. If these techniques don't help or if your symptoms are severe, you should visit an eye doctor.

- **Blink more often.** If you stare at a computer screen or read for a long period of time, you probably blink less. Not only can this cause dry eyes, but it can worsen the symptoms. Along with blinking more often, practice “full blinking” by gently squeezing your eyelids together to bathe your eyes with a fresh layer of tears.
- **Take eye breaks.** Eye experts often recommend that computer users follow the 20-20-20 rule. Every 20 minutes, look away from your screen to something that is at least 20 feet away and look at it for at least 20 seconds. This will ease dry eyes along with computer-related eye strain.
- **Increase air humidity.** If you don't have a humidifier, you can increase humidity in your home by venting your clothes dryer inside or by air-drying your laundry. You can also raise the humidity level by placing bowls of water on window sills or heating units and by increasing the number of houseplants you have. Finally, if you leave the bathroom door open when you shower or bathe, the steam and moisture will filter into other rooms.
- **Drink more liquid.** Avoid dehydration. Drink plenty of water each day—the classic rule of 8 to 10 glasses per day applies here and should help your eye dryness. And, drink less coffee as caffeine tends to dry out body tissues.

- **Wear sunglasses.** Wear high-quality sunglasses any time you're outdoors, preferably those with wraparound frames. These can protect your eyes from drying winds and irritating dust in the air. Choose lenses that block 100 percent of the sun's UV rays.
- **Keep your eyes clean.** Wash your eyes at bedtime with a warm washcloth to gently remove bacteria. Thoroughly remove eye makeup, which can clog glands near the eyelashes. Over-the-counter eyelid wipes are available in drugstores, or use diluted baby shampoo to wash your eyelids and eyelashes.

Dry eye symptoms can often be managed successfully at home but be sure to talk to your doctor if symptoms worsen. With the right combination of medicines and other therapies, you have a good chance of achieving more comfortable eyes – and maybe better eyesight.

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