

# Blepharitis

## What is blepharitis?

Blepharitis is an ongoing inflammation (swelling) of the eyelids. Both the upper and lower eyelids become coated with oily particles and bacteria near the base of the eyelashes. This common condition may cause irritation, itchiness, redness, and stinging or burning of the eye.

## What are the symptoms of blepharitis?

Symptoms include:

- Eye and eyelid irritation
- Itchiness of the eye
- Redness of the eye
- Burning sensation

## Who is at risk for blepharitis?

Blepharitis frequently occurs in people who have a tendency toward oily skin, dandruff or dry eyes. This condition also is associated with meibomianitis—a problem of the nearby oil glands of the eyelids (called meibomian glands).

## What causes blepharitis?

Everyone has bacteria on the surface of their skin, but in some people, bacteria thrive in the skin at the base of the eyelashes. Large amounts of bacteria around the eyelashes can cause dandruff-like scales and particles to form along the lashes and eyelid margins.

## How is blepharitis diagnosed?

A close examination of your eyelids and eyelashes by an ophthalmologist is usually all that is needed to diagnose blepharitis. Your ophthalmologist may test your vision, perform a slit-lamp microscope exam, and test your eye pressure as well.

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## How is blepharitis treated?

Blepharitis is often a chronic, or ongoing condition, but it can be controlled with the following treatment:

**Warm compresses.** Wet a clean washcloth with warm water, wring it out, and place it over your closed eyelids for at least one minute. Repeat two or three times, rewetting the washcloth as it cools. This will loosen scales and debris around your eyelashes. It also helps break down oil from nearby oil glands. This prevents development of a **chalazion**—an enlarged lump caused by clogged oil secretions in the eyelid.

**Eyelid scrubs.** Using a clean washcloth, cotton swab or commercial lint-free pad soaked in warm water, gently scrub the base of your eyelashes for about 15 seconds per eyelid.

**Antibiotic ointment.** Your ophthalmologist may prescribe an antibiotic ointment. Using a clean fingertip or cotton swab, gently apply a small amount at the base of the eyelashes before bedtime.

Artificial tears or steroid eyedrops may also be prescribed temporarily to relieve dry eye or inflammation. A new antibiotic drop that also helps improve the oil secretions of the meibomian glands may be prescribed by your ophthalmologist.

**Nutritional therapy.** Research suggests that a lack of certain nutrients may contribute to meibomian gland blepharitis. An imbalance of omega fatty acids has been found to cause abnormal secretions of the oil glands that help lubricate your eyes. Ask your ophthalmologist about a proper diet and nutritional supplements to help treat this imbalance.

**Good hygiene.** Because blepharitis can be an ongoing problem, you should regularly clean your skin and eyelids to keep blepharitis from returning. In addition to carefully cleansing your lashes, you can also wash your hair, scalp and eyebrows with antibacterial shampoo to help control blepharitis.