

## Blepharitis

If you require this information in an alternative language or format (such as Braille, audiotape or large print), please ask the staff who are looking after you.

### How do the eyelids work?

The eyelids protect the eye and spread the tears over its surface to maintain eye health and keep vision clear. Within the eyelids there are many small oil glands called meibomian glands (Fig 1). These secrete an oily substance which is vital for the health of the tear film and also slows tears drying away.

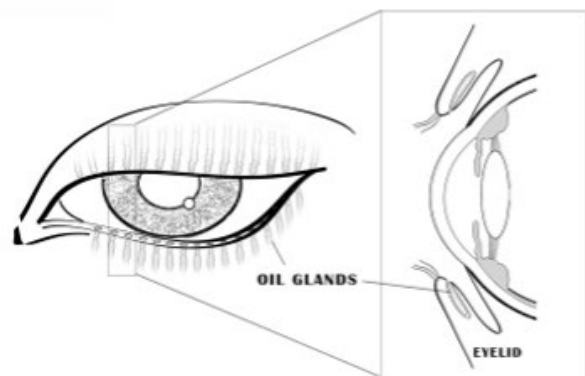


Fig 1. Anatomy of eyelids and oil glands

### What is Blepharitis?

Blepharitis is a common chronic condition that causes inflammation (irritation) of the eyelids. It responds well to simple treatment and, for most people, it is not harmful. Blepharitis can be associated with other skin conditions such as very dry or very oily skin, eczema, rosacea or dermatitis.

### What are the symptoms?

- Red-rimmed, sore eyes
- Itchiness
- Grittiness or foreign body sensation, like there is something in your eye
- Dryness
- Some people experience watering eyes

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- Burning
- Blurring of the vision
- Tired eyes
- Dandruff or crusting at the base of the eyelashes

### What causes blepharitis?

In blepharitis, the narrow opening to the meibomian glands become blocked. The oily secretions are less able to flow into the tear film which becomes deficient and the eyelids become irritated and inflamed. The result is dry, sore eyes. When the tear film does not have enough of the oily component the tears dry away more quickly. This causes the eye to produce more tears, but this doesn't help as the tears are still poor quality. This is why in some people blepharitis can cause watery eyes. In some people, blepharitis may be worsened by a sensitivity to the bacteria (Staphylococcus) that normally live on the skin.

### How is it treated?

There is no definitive cure for blepharitis but it can be successfully managed by a combination of warm compresses, massage and lid hygiene. The aim of this treatment is to encourage healthy tears to lubricate the eye and reduce eyelid inflammation.

This is achieved by:

1. **Heat treatment** which softens the oils in the eyelid glands
2. Unblocking the glands and expressing the softened oil with **massage**
3. Removing any flakes or excess bacteria with **lid hygiene**



If you have had **glaucoma surgery** in the past do not begin treatment with hot compresses and massage before talking to your glaucoma surgeon.

**Always wash your hands before and after touching your eyes**  
**Make sure to remove any contact lenses.**

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### Step 1. Heat treatment with a warm compress

#### Either

- A heated eye mask specifically for blepharitis can be purchased from your chemist, these are commonly called “eyebags”.
- The eye mask can be heated in the microwave to reach the optimum temperature.
- Place the eye mask over your eyes following the manufacturer instructions, usually for around 10 minutes.

#### Or

- Use a clean flannel and dip it into boiled water that has cooled to a bearable temperature.
- Put the flannel over your eyelids for 5 minutes and gently massage the eyelids, this helps to reduce the swelling and encourages the glands to drain.
- The flannel will need to be reheated during this period to maintain the optimum temperature.

### Step 2. Massage

This should always be performed straight after Step 1. The aim is to express the softened oils from the glands, ready to be cleaned away. There are 2 separate techniques, use the one which you find easiest.



Fig. 2 eyelid massage with forefinger

1. Use your index finger to apply pressure to the eyelid whilst slowly rolling it towards the eyelashes (Fig 2). Do this for both upper and lower eyelids.
2. Looking in the opposite direction (eg up for the lower lid and down for the upper lid) pinch the eyelid between your forefinger and thumb applying pressure between them.

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### Step 3. Lid Hygiene



Fig 3 cleaning the bases of the eyelashes with a cotton bud

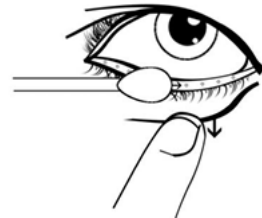


Fig 4 cleaning the eyelid margin behind the eyelashes with a cotton

- Use a cotton bud moistened with cooled boiled water
- Aim to clean both where the eyelashes come out of the skin (Fig 3) and the horizontal part of the eyelid margin behind the eyelashes (Fig 4) well with a gentle rubbing action
- To do this effectively you will need to pull the eyelid away from your eye with your finger.
- This aim is to remove any flakes or crusting from the base of the eyelashes, as well as cleaning away excess oils and bacteria.
- Rather than using cooled boiled water you may prefer a blepharitis treatment solution or specifically designed eyelid wipes (Fig 5) which may be more effective and can be purchased from your chemist.
- Although it has been used as a treatment historically, it is **not** recommended to use baby shampoo



Fig 5 cleaning the eyelid margin with eyelid wipes

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### How often will I need to clean my eyelids?

Continue with this treatment twice daily for two weeks, then once daily for a further two weeks. After that clean your eyelids two or three times a week even when the symptoms are not there, to reduce the severity and frequency of flare-ups. Blepharitis is a chronic condition so if you stop regular treatment it tends to recur.

### Other treatment options

#### 1. Lubricating eye drops

Your doctor is likely to offer you lubricating eye drops. These replace the oily part of the tear film which is deficient in blepharitis and treat dry eye.

#### 2. Further treatment

If your blepharitis is particularly stubborn or severe your doctor may recommend:

- Antibiotics in the form of eye drops or a tablet form
- Anti-inflammatory drops such as a steroid eye drop or ciclosporin.
- Omega-3 fatty acid supplements: There is evidence that long term use of omega-3 fatty acid supplements helps with blepharitis. Flaxseed oil or cod liver oil capsules are commonly used and can be purchased over the counter.

### Complications

#### Meibomian cyst (chalazion)

Blockage of an oil gland can lead to a meibomian cyst or chalazion, which leaves a round painless swelling in the eyelid (see separate information sheet)

Less commonly blepharitis can lead to a number of changes in the clear window at the front of the eye (cornea). This will usually require further treatment.

#### How do I contact the hospital?

Please contact the Eye Clinic Triage line within the hours of 9am-5pm Monday to Friday on 01423 542217

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### Further Information

Other sources of useful information can be found at:

NHS [www.nhs.co.uk](http://www.nhs.co.uk)

Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust website [www.hdfnhs.uk](http://www.hdfnhs.uk)

National Eye Institute <http://www.nei.nih.gov/health/>

### Feedback

If you have a concern, complaint or compliment, or would like to provide feedback regarding your experience of the Ophthalmology Service / clinic, please contact the Patient Experience Team via the following:

Patient Experience helpline 01423 555499 (Monday – Friday 9.30am – 4pm)

E-mail: [hdfn.patientexperience@nhs.net](mailto:hdfn.patientexperience@nhs.net)

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