

Blepharitis is inflammation of the eyelids. When the eyelids are inflamed they can become red and irritable with crusting on the eyelashes. The inflamed eyelids can inflame the eyeball. Behind the eyelashes there is a row of oil glands in the eyelids. These can become blocked when the eyelid is inflamed. If the oil glands are blocked the tears can evaporate quicker than normal leading to dry eye.



Whilst blepharitis is very common the causes are not fully understood. Ageing can play a role as can a buildup of abnormal bacteria (bacteria normally live all over the body, but a buildup of abnormal ones on the eyelid can cause blepharitis). There is no cure for blepharitis, but some of the treatments below will hopefully control it.

Eyelash cleaning We wash our hair but most people do not wash their eyelashes. This can lead to a buildup of abnormal bacteria causing blepharitis. Eyelid wipes (such as Systane Lid Wipes) or SteriLid eyelash shampoo can be used to clean the eyelashes. If there is a lot of crustiness on the eyelashes wiping the lashes with a cotton bud can help.

Warm compresses A hot (but not too hot!) facecloth applied to the closed eyelids for a few minutes a day will help unblock the oil in the oil glands and get them working properly again.

Lubricant eye drops These can be useful to treat the dry eye caused by blepharitis. Drops such as Optive Advanced or Systane Balance are designed especially for people with blepharitis. Some people also find sprays such as Tears Again or Optrex Actimist helpful.

Omega-3 fatty acid supplements These are a type of 'good fat' that are in abundance in oily cold-water fish and flaxseeds. Studies have shown that they can decrease inflammation on the eye and make the oil glands in the eyelids work better. They may also be beneficial for the heart and brain. They can be purchased from a chemist or healthfood store. Lacritec are supplements made especially for the eye and can be purchased online.

Antibiotics For reasons not fully understood, taking a course of antibiotic tablets can help blepharitis. Antibiotics used include azithromycin (used for 3 days) and doxycycline (used for at least 6 weeks). It is important to stay out of direct sunlight if using doxycycline and not to use it if pregnant.

Intense pulsed light (IPL) Is a newer treatment for blepharitis that improves the oil glands by shining intense light on them. Some patients have found it very helpful but unfortunately it is not covered by Medicare or health insurance funds.