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Dry eye is common and easily treated

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Our eyes can become dry and uncomfortable due to a number of things - irritants in the environment, age, gender, certain medications or medical conditions - that can leave them feeling gritty, burning, itchy, and often feeling like there is a foreign object present.

Dry eye syndrome (DES), is one where the eye produces an insufficient amount of tears to keep the eyes well hydrated. Tears are necessary for healthy eyes and clear vision. Dry eye is a common and often chronic problem but is easily treated.

Dry eye can be attributed to a number of factors, such as antihistamine or diuretic use, cigarette smoking, exposure to second-hand smoke, and environmental factors such as air drafts and low-humidity. DES can be classified as mild, moderate or severe. In the majority of patients, the condition is not sight-threatening and is characterized by troublesome symptoms of irritation, redness and intermittently blurred vision. If these symptoms are persistent, you should see your ophthalmologist who can easily diagnose the condition with a simple external examination of the eye lids and cornea

The primary approaches used to manage and treat dry eyes include adding tears, conserving tears, increasing tear production, and treating the inflammation of the eyelids or eye surface that contributes to the dry eyes. Mild cases can be treated with artificial tears, emulsions, gels, and ointments. Moderate cases of DES can be treated with anti-inflammatory therapies such as Restasis and topical steroids may be considered. Use of omega-3 fatty acid supplements has been reported to be beneficial.

Additional measures for more severe DES are oral medications such as immunosuppressives. Also, humidifying ambient air and avoiding air drafts by using shields and by changing the characteristics of airflow at work, at home, and in the car may be helpful.

Measures such as lowering the computer screen to below eye level to decrease lid aperture, scheduling regular breaks, and increasing blink frequency may decrease the discomfort associated with computer and reading activities.

Patients with Severe DES are at greater risk for contact lens intolerance and should be cautioned that refractive surgery, particularly LASIK, may worsen their dry eye condition.

Provided by University of Kentucky

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