

# Red and Dry Eyes

**Redness and dryness are symptoms of a range of eye disorders. Some of these disorders are minor, while others are serious and may result in loss of eye sight. Doctors, pharmacists and optometrists can help identify the cause of red eyes or dry eyes and advise on treatment.**

## Red eyes

Eye redness is often due to conjunctivitis. Conjunctivitis means inflammation of the conjunctiva, (the thin, clear membrane that covers the white part of the eye and the inside of the eyelids). Infection, allergy and irritation are common causes of conjunctivitis.

One or both eyes may be affected.

## Dry eyes

Eyes need to be covered by a film of tears, which is swept over the eyes with each blink. Eyes can become dry and irritated if:

- Blinking rate is low (e.g., while using a computer)
- Not enough lubricating tears are produced

- Tears do not have the right balance of ingredients to lubricate and protect the eye
- Tears do not stay in the eyes long enough.

Usually both eyes are affected.

## Treatment

Always ask a doctor, pharmacist or optometrist for advice about eye care and eye problems. They can recommend the best treatment for your eyes. A variety of eye drops and ointments can be obtained from a pharmacy without a prescription.

## Red eyes

The treatment of eye redness depends on its cause.

- Decongestant eye drops may relieve redness caused by irritation. Decongestant eye drops should not be used for more than 5 days in a row.

- Antihistamine eye drops may relieve eye redness, itching and inflammation caused by allergy.
- Antibiotic eye drops are used to treat bacterial conjunctivitis. They will not help viral conjunctivitis. Non-prescription antibiotic eye drops can be recommended by a pharmacist.
- Lubricating eye drops, gels and ointments may relieve the discomfort of viral conjunctivitis.

Eye redness and discomfort may also be relieved by resting the eyes, avoiding bright light, an eye bath or a warm or cool compress applied to the eye/s.

### Dry and irritated eyes

- Eye dryness and irritation may be relieved with 'artificial tears' eye drops, gels and ointments, which lubricate, moisturise and protect the eye. Preservative-free products are available for people who wear contact lenses or are sensitive to preservatives.

### Self care

- Wear wraparound sunglasses when outside in bright light or windy, dry or high allergy conditions.
- Wear eye protection when swimming or working with machines and chemicals.
- Try to identify and avoid allergy triggers.
- Do not rub your eyes.
- Blink more often to relieve dryness.
- Avoid blowing air in your eyes (e.g., hair dryers, fans, car heaters).
- Take regular breaks when reading or using a computer.
- Use good lighting.

- Limit alcohol.
- Avoid smoke (e.g., cigarette smoke).
- Do not use an eye product that was used by or prescribed for someone else.
- Discard multidose eye drops and ointments 28 days after opening the container, to avoid contamination.
- Have an annual eye check with an optometrist.

### How to use eye drops

1. Wash hands and sit or stand in front of a mirror, or lie down.
2. Tilt head back and look upwards.
3. With eye open, gently pull down lower eyelid to form a pouch.
4. Approach eye from the side and squeeze one drop into pouch. Do not let the tip of the dropper or tube touch the eye, eye lashes or any other surface.
5. Let go of eye lid and close eye. Try not to blink for a short time.
6. Press a finger gently against the inner corner of the eye (over the tear duct) for a few minutes, to stop drop draining through the tear duct to the nose.
7. For a second drop, wait several minutes after the first drop, to avoid washing out first drop.



## Important

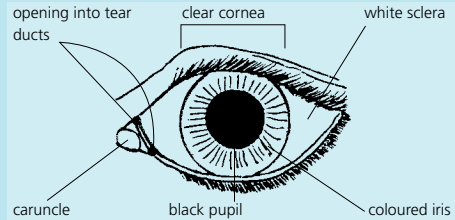
Redness and dryness can be symptoms of a serious eye disorder. Seek medical or optometrist advice urgently if you also have:

- Discomfort in bright light
- Distortion or loss of vision
- Clouding of the cornea
- Irregular shaped pupil
- Redness localised around the iris or pupil
- Eye pain (rather than itching, burning or irritation)
- Headache, nausea or vomiting
- Spilt a chemical in your eye.

In addition, consult a doctor or pharmacist if you have:

- A red eye which does not settle within 24 hours

- A cold with a clear discharge from the eyes that does not settle within a few days
- Discharge of pus from an eye
- A dry mouth as well as dry eyes
- Eyelids that are irritated and have crusts or flakes on them
- A lower eyelid that turns in or down, allowing the tears to run out of the eye.



## Symptoms and Causes

Condition	Eye Symptoms include	Causes include
Irritant conjunctivitis	Red, itchy, burning, swelling, watery discharge. No pus.	Dust, smoke, pool chlorine, tiredness, excess alcohol, rubbing eyes, sunlight, cosmetics, chemicals, foreign body
Allergic conjunctivitis	Red, itchy, burning, swollen lids, watery discharge. No pain or pus. Usually both eyes affected. Often accompanied by other allergy symptoms (e.g., sneezing, wheezing, itching).	Pollens, animals, cosmetics, chemicals
Infective conjunctivitis	<b>Bacterial</b> – red, burning, gritty, producing pus. Eyelids stuck together on waking. <b>Viral</b> – red, gritty, swelling, watery. No pus. Eyes sensitive to light	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Infection with bacteria</li> <li>• Infection with a virus (e.g., common cold)</li> </ul>
Dry eyes	Stinging, burning, gritty, itchy, tired, watery, stringy mucus in and around eyes, blurred vision, sensitive to light, difficulty wearing contact lenses. Usually both eyes affected	Ageing, some medicines, some medical conditions, blepharitis, eye damage, contact lenses, dry air computer use.

*For young children, close eye gently, put a couple of drops on skin at inner corner of eye, near nose. Tell child to open eyes while tilting head to the side – drops will run in across the eye.*

### How to use eye ointments

Follow steps 1-3 as for eye drops.

4. Squeeze a small amount of ointment (about 1cm) along the pouch.
5. Blink several times to spread the ointment.
6. If using eye drops at a similar time of day, use the ointment last.

## For more information

### Healthdirect Australia

Phone: 1800 022 222

Website: [www.healthinsite.gov.au](http://www.healthinsite.gov.au)

### Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)

Your pharmacist can advise on CMI leaflets.

### National Prescribing Service (NPS) Medicines Information

Phone: 1300 MEDICINE (1300 633 424)

Website: [www.nps.org.au](http://www.nps.org.au)

### The Poisons Information Centre

In case of poisoning phone 13 11 26 from anywhere in Australia.

*Pharmacists are medicines experts.  
Ask a pharmacist for advice when  
choosing a medicine.*

## Related fact cards

- » *Contact Lens Care*
- » *Glaucoma (website only – ask your pharmacist)*
- » *Hay fever*
- » *Sinus Problems*
- » *Smoking*
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