

# What Can I Do for My Dry Eyes?

**Dry eye syndrome is a common condition that affects as many as 10 million people in the United States.** Symptoms of dry eye syndrome include burning and an itchy or scratchy sensation, like having sand or grit in your eyes. Many people with dry eye syndrome have intermittent blurry vision that temporarily improves with rapid blinking. There are many causes of dry eye syndrome, but in general, the condition occurs because your tears are either abnormal or they are evaporating from your eye's surface too quickly.

Dry eye syndrome is often a nuisance, and in some cases, can lead to scarring of the eye's surface with loss of vision. There are several treatments available. These range from simple lifestyle modifications to prescription medications, depending on the severity of the condition.

If you have mild dry eyes, you may be able to improve your symptoms just by changing your environment. Sitting too close to a heating or air conditioning vent exposes the eye to a constant flow of forced air, which can make tears evaporate too quickly. Most heating systems dry out your home's air even if you don't sit too close to the vent; a humidifier can help put moisture back into the air. Cigarette smoke can irritate and dry out the eye surface as well, and quitting smoking often improves symptoms of dry eye syndrome.

If your eyes don't produce enough tears or don't produce healthy tears, there are tear replacements available. These artificial tears are sold over the counter in most drugstores and grocery stores. If your symptoms are mild to



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moderate, putting artificial tears into your eyes two to four times daily often helps relieve your symptoms. Artificial tears are available in multi-dose bottles and single-dose vials. The multi-dose bottles are less expensive but contain preservatives that some people cannot tolerate more than four times daily. The single-dose vials contain no preservatives and can be used more than four times daily, but they are generally more expensive.

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If you require artificial tears more than four times daily, you may benefit from punctal plugs. The punctum is the opening in the lower eyelid through which your tears drain away. Plugging the punctum makes your tears—or artificial tears—stay on your eye surface longer, which improves your dry eye symptoms. Punctal plugs are quickly, easily, and painlessly inserted during an office visit, and provide significant relief for many dry eye sufferers. If for any reason you are unsatisfied with them, they can be removed as easily as they are inserted.

Moderate to severe dry eye may require medical therapy. Prescription eye drops are available that stimulate your tear glands to produce more of your own natural tears. All medications have side effects, and prescription medications can be costly, so this solution may not be for everyone.

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