

speaking

Common Eye Diseases

Dry Eye Syndrome

Dryness of the surface of the eye is a very common condition especially in elderly, post-menopausal women. Dry eye does not mean that tears are not produced and paradoxically, many dry eye patients complain of tearing.

Signs and Symptoms

The most common symptom in dry eye is foreign body or sandy sensation especially worse on waking or when in front of a fan or air vent, often followed by tearing. Other symptoms are itching, stickiness, mucus discharge, and intermittent blurring of vision relieved by blinking. Severe dry eye can lead to eye pain and sensitivity to light.

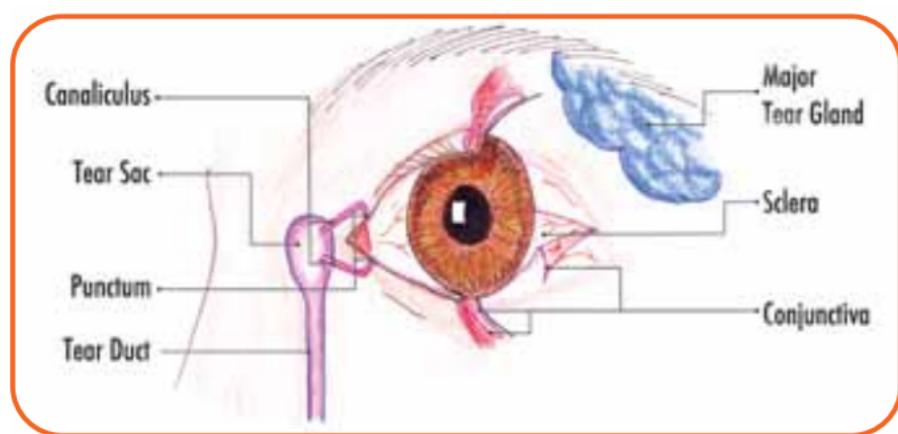
The variety of causes causing the same constellation of symptoms is collectively referred to as Dry Eye Syndrome. Inflammatory conditions of the ocular surface, chronic lid infection (see Eyelid Infections, Blepharitis), reduced sensitivity of that surface, and reduction in tear glands from hormonal changes have been implicated in dry eye. Although the term connotes a paucity of tears, this common condition may not necessarily mean just reduced lacrimal gland secretion. Some patients may have excessive loss of tears from evaporation as in patients with eyelid problems or those chronically exposed to gusts of wind. Some dry eye patients lack only components of the tear film, which reduces its stability leading to evaporative loss as well.

Loss of sensitivity of the corneal surface after refractive laser surgery may cause or aggravate pre-existing dry eye. Hormonal changes accompanying menopause may reduce tear formation. Arthritic conditions especially rheumatoid arthritis can lead to dryness of the eyes, the mouth and the female reproductive tract, a condition called Sjogren's syndrome.

Dry Eye Syndrome can be diagnosed by a competent eye doctor by observing the tear film at the Slit Lamp microscope. The tear film is made visible by adding fluorescein dye which shines under cobalt blue light. Some dyes (Rose Bengal or Lissamine Green) can stain dry or damaged areas of the ocular surface and help determine the severity of the problem.

Treatment

The symptoms of dry eye are not always commensurate with the signs of dryness. Initial treatment involves the use of "tear supplements," of which there are many available, varying in composition and viscosity. Associated exposure to noxious substances, drug use, or contact lens wear will have to be stopped.



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