

Dry Eye

The continuous production and drainage of tears is important to the eye's health. Tears keep the eye moist, help wounds heal, and protect against eye infection. In people with dry eye, the eye produces fewer or less quality tears and is unable to keep its surface lubricated and comfortable.

The tear film consists of three layers--an outer, oily (lipid) layer that keeps tears from evaporating too quickly and helps tears remain on the eye; a middle (aqueous) layer that nourishes the cornea and conjunctiva; and a bottom (mucin) layer that helps to spread the aqueous layer across the eye to ensure that the eye remains wet. As we age, the eyes usually produce fewer tears. Also, in some cases, the lipid and mucin layers produced by the eye are of such poor quality that tears cannot remain in the eye long enough to keep the eye sufficiently lubricated.

The main symptom of dry eye is usually a scratchy or sandy feeling as if something is in the eye. Other symptoms may include stinging or burning of the eye; episodes of excess tearing that follow periods of very dry sensation; a stringy discharge from the eye; and pain and redness of the eye. Sometimes people with dry eye experience heaviness of the eyelids or blurred, changing, or decreased vision, although loss of vision is uncommon. Dry eye is more common in women, especially after menopause. Surprisingly, some people with dry eye may have tears that run down their cheeks. This is because the eye may be producing less of the lipid and mucin layers of the tear film, which help keep tears in the eye. When this happens, tears do not stay in the eye long enough to thoroughly moisten it.

Dry eye can occur in climates with dry air, as well as with the use of some drugs, including antihistamines, nasal decongestants, tranquilizers, and anti-depressant drugs. People with dry eye should let their health care providers know all the medications they are taking, since some of them may intensify dry eye symptoms.

People with connective tissue diseases, such as rheumatoid arthritis, can also develop dry eye. It is important to note that dry eye is sometimes a symptom of Sjögren's syndrome, a disease that attacks the body's lubricating glands, such as the tear and salivary glands. A complete physical examination may diagnose any underlying diseases.

Luckily, there are new treatment options available to Dry Eye Sufferers. Southern Eye Associates offices are considered Dry Eye Centers of Excellence. The eye specialists of Southern Eye Associates have offices in Greenville and Greer, and these ophthalmologists accept most health insurances.

For more information about Dry Eye Diseases and treatments available or any other matter related to eye care please contact Southern Eye at 864-269-3333 or visit our website at www.southern-eye.com.