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# LIVING WITH

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2021



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# STATS & FACTS

By Sonya Collins

Reviewed by Michael W. Smith, MD, WebMD Chief Medical Director

# 1/3

**The amount that genetics plays** in your odds for dry eye disease. Your environment most likely explains the rest of your risk.



# 8 TO 10

**Number of glasses of water per day** that could improve your dry eye symptoms.



# 2x

**Women's chances of getting dry eye disease** compared with men's.



# 4x

**How much the chance for dry eye increases** for contact lens wearers.



# 7 to 8

**Number of hours of sleep** per night that could help make your dry eye symptoms better.



SOURCES: *Investigative Ophthalmology and Visual Science, American Journal of Ophthalmology, National Eye Institute*

GETTY IMAGES

## ADVERTISEMENT

# THREE STEPS TO RELIEVE YOUR DRY EYE SYMPTOMS

Created by an ophthalmologist and recommended by eye doctors, TheraTears® is a complete line of products that work together to provide a comprehensive dry eye regimen. Here's how:

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Many doctors recommend eyelid cleansing to remove the debris and bacteria that can aggravate dry eye symptoms. TheraTears® SteriLid® Antimicrobial Eyelid Cleanser is the first FDA-accepted antimicrobial eyelid cleanser. It comes in a gentle, pH-balanced formula that eliminates 99.9% of bacteria\* and is as effective as a prescription.

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# THE LATEST ON

## DRY EYE DISEASE

### WELL-BEING WOES

Dry eye disease affects your emotional health, too. In a survey of 1,000 adults with dry eye disease and 1,000 without, people with this condition were more likely to have problems getting around and completing their daily activities. People with the worst symptoms said the disease interfered with their social and professional lives and their emotional well-being. Overall, those with dry eye disease were more likely to have depression and anxiety than those without. If you think you are depressed, talk to your doctor. Treatment helps.

SOURCE: *BMJ Open*

# 16.4 million

Number of U.S. adults who have dry eye disease.

SOURCE: *American Journal of Ophthalmology*

# 50+

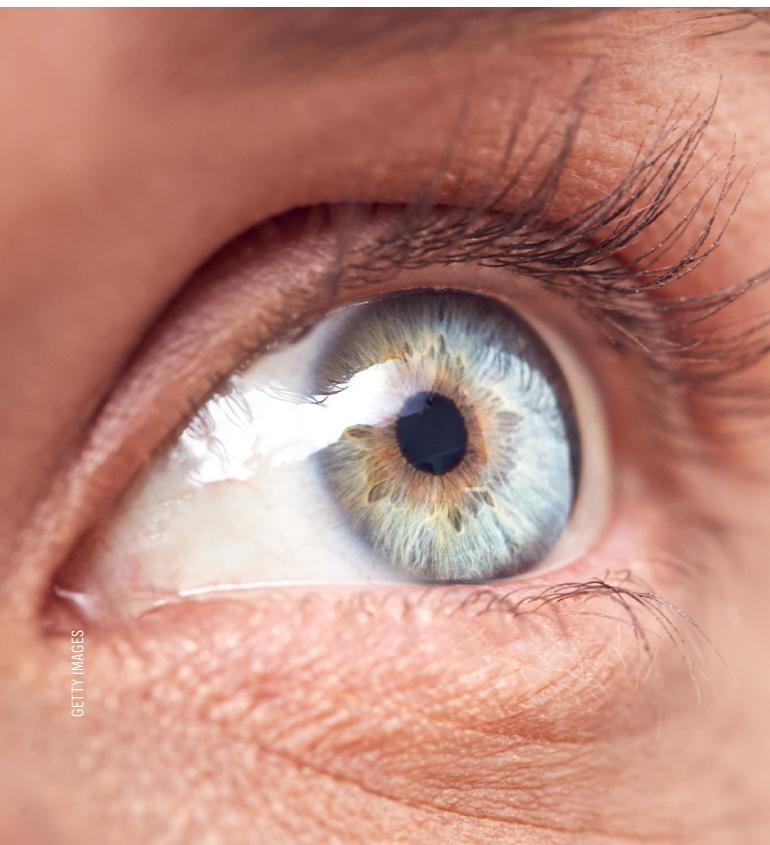
Age range at which odds for dry eye increases.

SOURCE: National Eye Institute

### DOES HAVING A MIGRAINE GET ON YOUR NERVES?

Do you get migraines? Many people with dry eye disease do. Migraines with light sensitivity are especially common among people who have dry eye. Researchers believe the conditions may have a common cause. Ongoing studies aim to uncover the link. One new theory is that nerve problems are behind all three issues: dry eye, migraine, and light sensitivity. Research suggests that a specific type of nerve damage in the cornea—the transparent part that covers the front of the eye—plays a role in each. If your treatment for tear dysfunction isn't effective, and you have migraines, you might need treatment for nerve problems.

SOURCE: *Eye and Brain*



GETTY IMAGES



# WHY ARE MY EYES SO DRY?

## AN OPTOMETRIST ADDRESSES SOME COMMON CAUSES

By Matt McMillen

Reviewed by Michael W. Smith, MD,  
WebMD Chief Medical Director

Dry eye causes a lot of discomfort: red eyes, itching, tearing, burning, blurred vision, and more. But what causes dry eye? There's a long list of culprits behind the disease, as well as factors that can make it worse. Angela Bevels, OD, of Elite Dry Eye Spa in Tucson, AZ, walks us through a few of the most common.

### HORMONAL CHANGES

Dry eye affects many more women than it does men. After age 50, women are more than twice as likely to develop it. The reason: Hormone changes that occur during menopause affect glands involved in tear production.

“Hormonal imbalances really come into play and cause a lot of discomfort,”

says Bevels, who has dry eye herself.

Hormones play a role in tear production and many of the mechanisms related to it, such as tear evaporation and drainage, but how hormones influence dry eye disease remains to be discovered. Increased amounts of the sex hormones estradiol and testosterone may be to blame.

### SCREEN TIME

Bevels says she expects that dry eye statistics will soon reflect the impact of one of our most common everyday practices: staring at a screen.

“When we are on our computers or staring at our phones for long periods, we tend to blink less,” she explains.

And because of that, the surface of our eyes does not get properly moisturized, leading to dry eye symptoms.

“In my dry eye practice, I've been seeing more and more college students and people in their 20s in the last few years,” Bevels says. “It's not just 45-plus-year-old women.”

### YOUR ENVIRONMENT

The climate you live in and what's going on around you can have a big impact on your eyes, Bevels says. For example, if you use a ceiling fan in your bedroom, the wind it creates can dry the air and, hence, your eyes. The same thing happens if you venture outdoors in windy weather.

“A lot of my patients experience that,” Bevels says.

Another indoor irritant to pay attention to as the weather gets colder is heat. When you turn the heat on in the fall, you'll

## QUICK TIPS TO RELIEVE DRY EYE

+ Try over-the-counter preservative-free artificial tears.

+ Use a humidifier in your bedroom and other rooms you spend time in, in order to reduce the dryness of the air.

+ Take a screen break every 20 minutes. Look away and blink your eyes several times.

inevitably dry the air in your home, creating conditions that will exacerbate your dry eye.

### CHRONIC DISEASES AND DRY EYE

Diabetes is just one example of a chronic condition that can cause dry eye. When it's not well-managed, diabetes leads to nerve damage that can affect your lacrimal glands, one of the eye glands involved in tear production.

Autoimmune diseases, such as lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, and Sjogren's syndrome, also lead to dry eye, exacerbating symptoms when those diseases flare up, Bevels says. She points out that the inflammation triggered by these diseases can harm your tear-producing glands: “The cycles of inflammation lead to dry eye.”

# CHANGE IS GOOD

## TRY THESE TWEAKS TO HELP RELIEVE DRY EYE

By Matt McMillen

Reviewed by Michael W. Smith, MD,  
WebMD Chief Medical Director

If you have dry eye, you can help yourself feel better. Ophthalmologist Mark Fromer, MD, of Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City, offers his top self-care remedies.

### ARTIFICIAL TEARS

Buy preservative-free, single-dose vials and use as needed. Also, try artificial tear gel or ointment. They temporarily blur your vision, so use right before sleep.

“Then you’ll start the next day with a healthier cornea,” Fromer says.

### HYGIENE ROUTINE

Crusty oil particles can block your tear glands. To unplug them, clean your lids with a warm washcloth or a little baby shampoo on a cotton ball.

“Try it once in the morning to start,” he says. “If that’s not enough, do it again right before bed.”

### WARM COMPRESSES

Lay a warm compress or a gently heated bean bag eye pillow on your eyes for 10 minutes after you lie down in bed. Add another round to your morning routine if necessary.

“This will help your glands release oil to coat your cornea and make you more comfortable,” Fromer says.

### SCREEN BREAKS

Too much screen time causes dry eye, so follow the 20-20-20 rule. Every 20 minutes, relax your eyes by staring out to a distance of about 20 feet, for about 20 seconds.



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The unique electrolyte formula corrects the salt imbalance that can cause dry eye



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# LIVING WITH CHRONIC DRY EYE

## FROM DIAGNOSIS TO MANAGEMENT

By Michelle Spieler

Reviewed by Michael W. Smith, MD, WebMD Chief Medical Director

I was diagnosed with chronic dry eye by an ophthalmologist in the late '90s after my eyes had been tearing up like crazy. Shortly after, I started working as a makeup artist in TV and film. In this field, your face is your portfolio. So when my right eye would tear up when I tried to put makeup on, it was both embarrassing and humbling. If my makeup didn't look good, how could I convince others that I was in the right profession and qualified to do their faces?

For years, I made sure no air-conditioning blew on my face. I didn't even roll the windows down in the car. And I always kept extra lashes and makeup with me for when—not if—my eyes started watering.

My eye doctor put eye plugs in my tear ducts shortly after I was diagnosed, which worked for a while, but after some time, I could feel them poking my eyes whenever I looked down. They were very uncomfortable, but I didn't have any other options.

I wore these eye plugs for years with discomfort before I saw a commercial for special drops to help with dry eye. I went to another eye doctor to see if I could get relief. He gave me some eye drop samples and suggested I get the plugs removed. Come to find out, the plug in my left eye had already fallen out! With the eye

plugs out and the special drops in, I felt an immediate difference. When I started using them, I did one drop in each eye each morning and one drop in each eye before bed. Once under control, I just did mornings and often only my right eye, which is my problem eye.

As the eye product industry grew, I started using moisturizing gel drops, which really coat the eyeball. Now, I rarely use the moisturizing drops, but I do use drops that help reduce redness. My eyes are the brightest white now.

Because of my experience, I'm passionate about helping other women. I've started a YouTube page where I give tips for living with dry eye and beauty advice for women over 40. A lot of women who don't know they have dry eye think they're allergic to makeup and they're a little depressed about it. For a long time, I thought I just had allergies, too. Whether you're a makeup person or not, most women like to have the option to wear it from time to time.

Those early days in the entertainment industry were tough. It was a constant challenge in my life. Nowadays, I still do makeup in the TV and film industry, I'm

growing my online presence, and I do photography and photoshop editing. I rely on my eyes a lot! But thanks to those special eye drops, my chronic dry eye is definitely more manageable now.



### MICHELLE'S TIPS

#### + BE PERSISTENT

I didn't get relief right away, but I kept asking questions. Keep trying until you have a solution.

#### + LOOK AT YOUR DIET

I've found some relief eating a healthy diet and foods that don't cause as much inflammation in my body. I try to avoid a lot of sugar and dairy.

#### + ASK FOR SAMPLES

Some medications that can really help you might be on the pricier side. Don't be afraid to ask your doctor for samples. I'm so glad I did!



GETTY IMAGES; INSET IMAGE COURTESY OF MICHELLE SPIELER

# DRY EYE

## TIPS TO HELP MANAGE THIS CONDITION

By Matt McMillen

Reviewed by Michael W. Smith, MD, WebMD Chief Medical Director



GETTY IMAGES

### 1 CLEAR THE AIR

Use a high-quality air filter if indoor irritants trouble your eyes.

### 2 GO DARK

Wear wraparound sunglasses when it's windy outside.

### 3 DRINK UP

Consume plenty of water to avoid tear-reducing dehydration.

### 4 STAY COOL

Avoid excessively warm rooms that are filled with dry air.

### 5 ADJUST YOUR AIM

Point hair dryers and car vents away from your eyes.

## EXPERT TIP

**Matthew Gorski, MD,**  
ophthalmologist,  
Northwell Health, Great  
Neck, NY

“During fall, dry eye syndrome often worsens due to the cooler temperatures, lower humidity, and increasing use of dry heat in people’s homes. The hormonal fluctuations that occur during menopause can exacerbate these weather-related risk factors. To relieve your symptoms, try over-the-counter preservative-free artificial tears, a home humidifier, and warm compresses. If you have severe dry eye, see your eye doctor. Medications and in-office procedures can offer relief.”

## ADVERTISEMENT



## DO YOU KNOW DRY EYE'S DIRTY LITTLE SECRET?

Bacteria on your eyelids can aggravate dry eye symptoms.

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\*Antimicrobial

1. Data on file, Akorn Consumer Health



# CARING FOR SEVERE DRY EYE

## RELIEF FOR YOUR CONDITION

By Rachel Reiff Ellis

Reviewed by Alan Kozarsky, MD,  
WebMD Medical Reviewer

Dry eye doesn't have a cure, but there are many treatments to greatly improve it. Not only can you get relief from eye irritations, you can help stop the condition in its tracks before it gets worse with the right therapy.

"The focus on dry eye treatment has shifted from treatment of symptoms towards prevention of progression of disease," says Priscilla Fowler, MD, assistant professor at The University of Alabama at Birmingham's Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences.

### STEPS TO QUALITY TREATMENT

Your doctor needs to figure out the cause behind your condition to effectively treat it. You may be dealing with hormone changes, an autoimmune disease, inflamed eyelid glands, or allergic eye disease. Or your eyes might not be making enough tears, or your tears could be evaporating too quickly.

Fowler says your doctor will likely suggest a combination of treatments. "It's rare for one single treatment to work alone," she says. And early treatment is best, so don't wait to see someone about your issues.

"The sooner you are evaluated before disease progression occurs, the better you will do and the faster symptoms will improve," she says.

### TYPES OF TREATMENTS

When lubricating eye drops don't relieve symptoms, you may need one or more of the following treatments depending on the cause of your dry eye.

**Anti-inflammatory drops.** For inflamed corneas, your doctor can prescribe eye drops with either an immune-suppressing medication or steroids.

**Tear duct plugs.** A doctor puts a plug in the tear drain in your eyelid to hold tears in your eye longer. "We do this

## AT-HOME HELP

In addition to the treatment your doctor prescribes, Priscilla Fowler, MD, suggests trying these therapies for symptom relief:

- + Microwavable warm compresses for 10 minutes once a day
- + Preservative-free lubricating drops
- + Omega-3 supplements
- + Environment changes: increase humidity, cut back on airflow from fans or wind
- + Decreased screen time

Alongside your treatments, these steps should bring you relief.

"Most patients, if given enough time with the correct therapeutic regimen, will report more good days than bad," Fowler says.

after tear inflammation is under control," Fowler says.

**Hydroxypropyl cellulose ophthalmic inserts.** These are small time-released pellets you place under your lower eyelid that release lubricant all day long.

**Unblocking oil glands.** Heat treatment with eyelid massage or intense pulse light therapy can help when other therapies aren't working.

**Special contact lenses.** Scleral or bandage lenses both protect the surface of your eye and hold in moisture.

**Tear stimulating drugs.** If you have Sjogren's syndrome, these can help increase the watery part of your tears.

**Autologous serum tears.** A lab uses serum from your own blood to create lubricating drops. "They're beneficial because they contain nutrient and anti-inflammatory factors that are good for eye surface health," Fowler says.

# TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

## How much do you know about dry eye?

By Rachel Reiff Ellis  
 Reviewed by Michael W. Smith, MD,  
 WebMD Chief Medical Director



### ANSWERS:

1. You're more likely to have dry eye if you're a woman.

- True  False

2. Having dry eye means you have no moisture in your eye.

- True  False

3. Most people over 65 will experience dry eye symptoms.

- True  False

1. **True:** The hormone changes caused by pregnancy, menopause, and birth control pills all raise your chances of getting dry eye, making women more likely to deal with this condition.

2. **False:** One of the symptoms of dry eye is watery eyes. Your eyes react to the irritation of dry eye by making more tears.

3. **True:** As you age, your eyes naturally get drier, leading to occasional bouts of the redness, watery eyes, stinging, and burning of dry eye.

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\*This claim has not been evaluated by the FDA. This product is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any disease.

# DRY EYE AND SCREEN TIME

## HOW DIGITAL DISPLAYS CAN AFFECT YOUR CONDITION

By Rachel Reiff Ellis

Reviewed by Alan Kozarsky, MD, WebMD Medical Reviewer

### BY THE NUMBERS

**16 million.** Number of Americans who have been diagnosed with dry eye disease.

**15x.** Amount of times you typically blink per minute. When you're on a screen, that number drops to five to seven times a minute.

**80%.** Amount of U.S. adults who report using digital devices for more than 2 hours per day, and 67% use two or more devices at once.

Chances are you spend at least some part of your day looking at a television, smartphone, or computer. Staring at a screen for too long can affect anyone, but when you're dealing with dry eye, it's a good idea to pay special attention to how it could be increasing your symptoms.

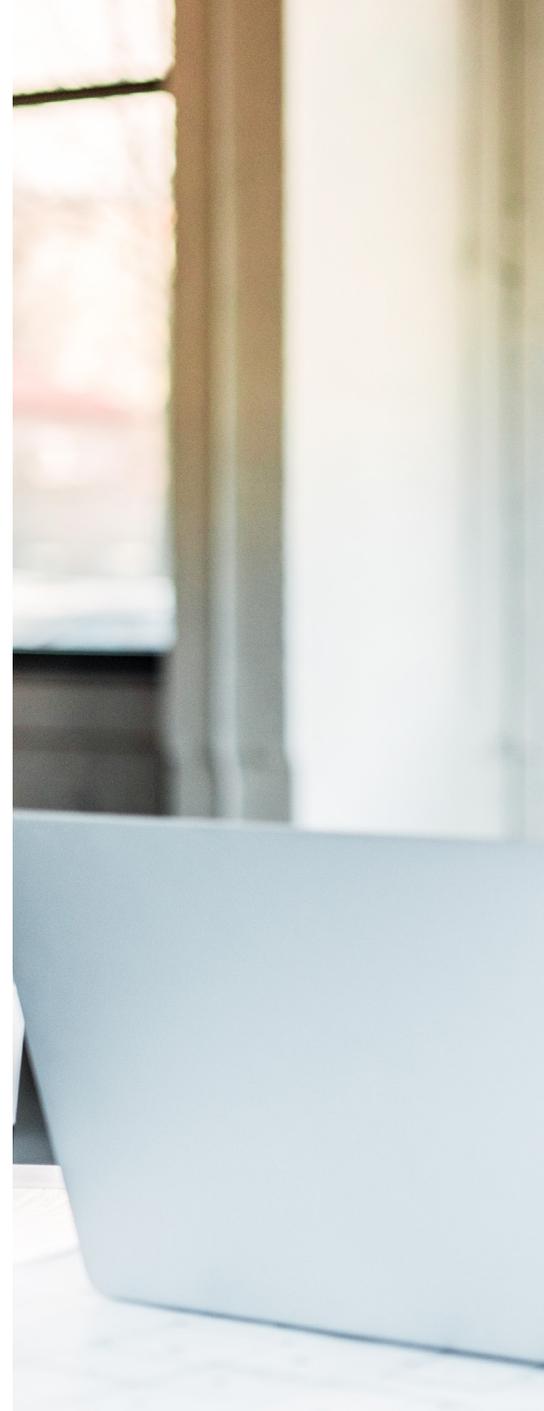
"Any activity that is repetitive can cause health issues, whether it's doing the same movement with your hand resulting in hand pain or the same poor posture resulting in back pain," says Sumitra Khandelwal, MD, associate professor of ophthalmology at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston. "If you repeatedly stare at a screen, you'll start to feel the effects in your eyes."

Experts haven't done enough research to be able to point to screen usage as a cause of long-term dry eye.

"We're still researching if computer-use dry eye causes long-term dry eye changes or if it's just temporary," Khandelwal says.

But either way, she says, just like dry hands need lotion to keep moist and prevent long-term changes, dry eyes need treatment like eye drops and rest during computer use to prevent long-term changes.

"Screen time can definitely exacerbate the issue," says Nancy McNamara, OD, PhD, professor at UC Berkeley School of Optometry and co-chief at UC Berkeley Dry Eye Clinic.





## PROTECT YOUR PEEPERS

Sumitra Khandelwal, MD, shares some tips to help you care for your eyes.

### Check your levels.

Looking up exposes more of your eye to dryness. Keep computer monitors at screen eye level or even below.

**Assess the environment.** Turn off overhead fans and use a humidifier when you use screens.

**Take breaks.** Your eyes need to move and blink often. Pause screen time often to stare at a distance target for 1 minute.

**Keep lubrication nearby.** It's amazing how much more you will use eye drops if they're arm distance away.

## BLINKING: THE BIG PROBLEM

Staring at a screen can drop the number of times you blink by half. When you blink, it circulates tears and gives your eyelids a chance to make oils, which lubricates your eyes. Long periods of time without this cycle will cause symptoms of dry eye.

“Even in the best-case scenario, your tear film can only hold itself on the surface of the eye to keep the eye moist for about 10 seconds,” McNamara says. The longer you're on a screen and the

less blinking you do, she says, the more likely you are to eventually end up with burning, dry eyes.

## HEALTHY HABITS

“We can't prevent screen usage—it's the way of our future,” Khandelwal says. “But it's important to start healthy habits early and encourage our next generation to follow suit.”

Awareness is key: Watch how much you're on screens and see if you can reduce that amount. And when you do use screens, work on better ways to do so.

“With my patients, we often talk about the 20-20-20 rule,” McNamara says. “Every 20 minutes, take at least 20 seconds to look at something that's 20 feet away.”

She also recommends searching out apps you can download on your phone or computer that remind you to blink and take screen breaks.

“You can even go a step further and take a 5- to 10-minute break to lie down with a warm compress mask,” McNamara says. This helps to release oil into the two little glands that line the upper and lower eyelid margins and keep your eyes moist.

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