

# Blepharitis

## Information for patients

This leaflet explains what blepharitis is, the symptoms it can cause and how you can look after your eyelids.

If you have any questions or concerns, please speak to a member of the healthcare team caring for you.

**[www.kch.nhs.uk](http://www.kch.nhs.uk)**

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### **What is blepharitis?**

Blepharitis is an inflammation of the edges of the eyelids. It is a very common cause of eye discomfort and irritation and usually affects both eyes.

Blepharitis is usually a chronic (long-term) condition. Symptoms can come and go, so regular eyelid care is important even when your eyes are feeling better.

Blepharitis is not contagious, which means you cannot catch it from someone else.

### **Why do I have blepharitis?**

There are tiny oil-producing glands behind the roots of your eyelashes called meibomian glands. These glands make an oily layer that helps stop your tears from drying out too quickly.

In blepharitis, these glands can become blocked or inflamed. Oil, flakes and crusts can then build up around the eyelid edges and eyelashes.

### **What are the symptoms?**

Common symptoms include sore or irritated eyelids, burning or stinging eyes, a gritty or sandy feeling in the eyes, itchy eyes or eyelids.

Your eyelids may also become swollen and red or discoloured, and you may have crusting or flakes around the eyelashes.

You may lose some eyelashes and sometimes styes (painful lumps) or chalazion (painless, slow-growing lumps) may develop.

The symptoms are usually worse in the morning and can vary day by day.

## How do I treat blepharitis?

Regular eyelid care is the main treatment for blepharitis.

It has three steps:

1. Warm
2. Massage
3. Clean

Doing these steps in this order helps to soften oils in your eyelid glands, encourage the oils to flow and remove crusts and debris from around your eyelashes.

Your healthcare professional will tell you how often you should follow the routine. It is commonly carried out twice a day and continued regularly to help prevent symptoms returning.

### Step 1: Warm your eyelids

Warmth helps to soften thickened oil inside the glands in your eyelids.

1. Wash and dry your hands and remove any contact lenses.
2. Take clean cotton wool pads and dip them in cooled boiled water that is still warm.
3. With your eyes closed, place a pad over your closed eyelids.
4. Make sure that, as they cool, you reheat the cotton wool pads in the warm water. Keep the pads warm but they must not be hot enough to burn your skin.
5. Apply the pads for approximately three minutes per eye, using a separate cotton wool pad for each eye.

Alternatively, you can use a clean flannel soaked in warm water, or a reusable heated eye mask or eye bags. If you use a reusable heated eye mask, follow the manufacturer's heating and cleaning instructions.

### Step 2: Massage your eyelids

Massage your eyelids straight after the warm compress, while the oils are still warm.

1. For the upper eyelid, close your eye and massage downwards from the top to the bottom, towards the eyelashes.
2. For the lower eyelid, massage upwards towards the eyelashes.
3. Massage along the whole width of the upper and lower eyelids.
4. Use firm but gentle pressure. Massage should not be painful and you should avoid pressing directly onto the eyeball.

### Step 3: Clean your eyelid edges

Cleaning removes excess oil, flakes and crusts from around the roots of your eyelashes.

1. Wash and dry your hands.
2. Looking in a mirror may make this easier.
3. Use a clean eyelid wipe or a clean cotton wool pad with an appropriate eyelid cleaning solution.

4. Gently but firmly wipe along the edge of the eyelid and around the roots of the eyelashes.
5. Use a fresh wipe or pad for each eye.
6. Be careful not to rub the surface of your eye.

Preservative-free eyelid cleaning lotions and wipes are available from pharmacies and other retailers. Please ask your eye specialist or pharmacist if you are unsure which product to use.

## Other treatments for blepharitis

Regular eye lid care is usually the most important part of treatment. Some people also need additional treatment.

- **Lubricating eye drops or ointment:** Lubricating eye drops or ointment may be prescribed if your eyes feel dry, gritty or uncomfortable.
- **Antibiotic treatment:** If your symptoms are more severe or do not improve with regular eyelid care, a doctor may prescribe antibiotic ointment, eye drops or in some cases antibiotic tablets. Use these exactly as prescribed.
- **Anti-inflammatory eye drops:** Some people may need anti-inflammatory treatment, such as steroid eye drops, if there is significant inflammation. These medicines should only be used when prescribed and monitored by an appropriate healthcare professional.

### Remember

Blepharitis is a chronic condition, so you will need to keep performing regular eyelid care long term. To begin with do it twice a day. As the symptoms improve, do it at least three times a week to prevent the symptoms from getting worse.

## Who can I contact with queries and concerns?

If you would like more information, please do not hesitate to contact your doctor or eye specialist who cares for you.

Tel: **020 3299 1845**, Monday to Thursday, 9am to 5pm; Friday, 9am to midday.

In an emergency, contact your GP or go to your local Emergency Department (ED/A&E).

## MyChart

Our MyChart app and website lets you securely access parts of your health record with us, giving you more control over your care. To sign up or for help, call us on 020 3299 4618 or email [kings.mychart@nhs.net](mailto:kings.mychart@nhs.net). To find out more visit [www.kch.nhs.uk/mychart](http://www.kch.nhs.uk/mychart)

## **PALS**

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) is a service that offers support, information and assistance to patients, relatives and visitors. They can also provide help and advice if you have a concern or complaint that staff have not been able to resolve for you. They can also pass on praise or thanks to our teams.

Tel: **020 3299 4618**

Email: **kings.pals@nhs.net**

**If you would like the information in this leaflet in a different language or format, please contact our Interpreting and Accessible Communication Support on 020 3299 4618 or email [kings.access@nhs.net](mailto:kings.access@nhs.net).**