

Ramkrishna Netralaya – Article on Dry Eyes



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What is Dry Eye?

Dry eye is a common condition that occurs when eyes don't make enough tears or is unable to maintain layers of tears in the eye. Over time it leads to Inflammation and damage to the eye's surface causing symptoms like

- burning, red, irritated eye
- blurred vision
- scratchy, gritty feeling in eyes
- light sensitivity
- stringy mucus discharge.

Common causes of dry eyes include:

- Health conditions, like rheumatoid arthritis, thyroid disease
- Hormone changes in females
- Certain medications
- A smokey, windy, or dry climate
- Contact lenses use
- Looking at screens or reading for prolonged periods of time

Who is most at risk for this eye condition? Why are teens being diagnosed with dry eye more often?

Older adults are typically considered most at risk for dry eye. However, increase in number of teenagers with dry eye is due to a combination of social and environmental factors including an increase in screen time due to portable digital devices and online work.

Dry eye can be a problem for children in school as it can lead to headaches and sleep disorders, difficulty to perform necessary activities like reading and using a computer.

Screen time increases the probability of dry eye because people blink less when they keep their eyes open to focus on the display. Not blinking increases exposure and evaporation time off the ocular surface of the eye and can lead to instability in the tear film layer.

How long does dry eye last?

Dry eye can be a temporary or chronic condition. If symptoms are mild, relief may come immediately with treatment like drops. For more chronic dry eye, it may take several weeks or months of treatment for relief.

How do you prevent and treat dry eye in teenagers?

Preventive measures for dry eyes include

- Limit screen time and take regular breaks from looking at screens
- Blink more frequently
- Eating a diet rich in vitamin A and omega-3 fatty acids (or taking a supplement) to promote good eye health and the quality of tears
- Drinking plenty of water and using a cool mist humidifier

Treatment option for dry eyes includes:

- Artificial tears or eye drops
- Warm compresses
- Eye ointments
- Lifestyle changes (using a humidifier, avoiding potential environmental triggers, limiting screen time, wearing wraparound sunglasses, increasing water consumption, etc.)
- Punctal plugs and surgery (very rare, but may be useful in situations where eyelids are too loose)
- Takeaway message

Number of teens and young adults diagnosed with dry eyes has been on the rise. An increase in amount of screen time may be responsible for this. Trying to take frequent breaks when looking at a screen is necessary, limiting screen time whenever possible, and even making a conscious effort to remember to blink can all help to reduce the chances of developing dry eye.

It's important to seek medical assistance if you experience vision problems or have any concerns about your eyesight... no matter your age!