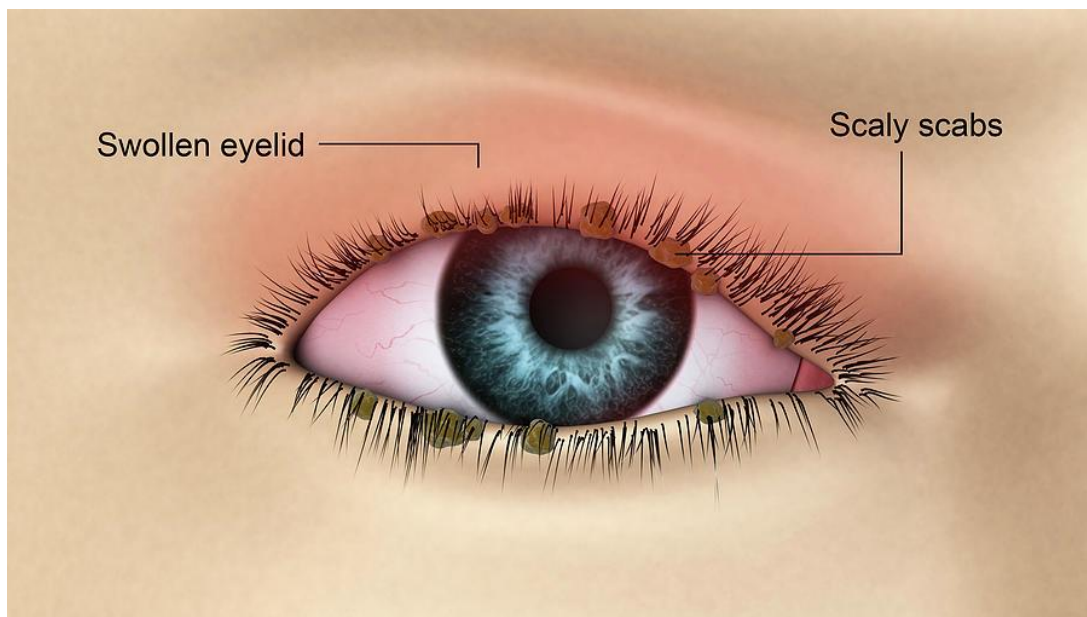

SELF-CARE INFO ON BLEPHARITIS & LID HYGIENE

What is Blepharitis?

Blepharitis is an inflammatory condition that affects the margins of the eyelids and causes itching and irritation. It usually affects both eyes and it can occur at any age. Although Blepharitis maybe uncomfortable, it is not a sight threatening condition.



Symptoms

Blepharitis may cause one or more of the following:

- Itchiness around the eyes.
- Persistent irritation or 'burning' sensation.
- Redness and swelling of the eyelid edges.
- Tiny flakes on the eyelashes.
- Crusting of the eyelids, especially in the morning.
- Eyelid cysts / styes.
- Sensation of 'grit' in the eye.
- Redness of the eye.

Symptoms may come and go. It is common to have flare ups or long periods with no symptoms

Causes

Blepharitis may be due to a combination of one or more of the following:

- *Dry eyes* due to a disorder of the Meibomian oil producing glands at the edge of the eyelid. There are Meibomian glands inside the eyelids with openings onto the lid margins which naturally produce oil. This oil stops the watery element of the tear film from drying out. At times the Meibomian glands become blocked; this leads to the tear film breaking down and evaporating resulting in dry eyes.
- There may be a *build-up of crusts around the eyelashes*, which the body's own bacteria reacts to.
- The Meibomian glands may also produce *excess oil* which clogs the lashes causing skin disorders such as acne rosacea, which leads to red and inflamed skin, and scalp dandruff (seborrheic dermatitis).

How long will it last?

Blepharitis is a persistent condition, but the symptoms can come and go. There is no one off cure, but it is possible to treat, control and manage Blepharitis with a simple eyelid hygiene regime.

Is it serious?

No - although Blepharitis can be uncomfortable for the sufferer, it rarely causes problems to the eye itself.

Is it an infection?

No, but rather there may be over activity of normal skin organisms. These normal skin flora (bacteria and occasional fungi) flourish in debris/secretions that build up on the edge of the eyelids. Therefore, regular cleaning of the eyelids is important.

Treatment

The treatment of Blepharitis involves the regular cleaning of the eyelids and lashes to remove the irritating substances. The aim of regular cleaning of the eyelids and lashes is to soothe the eyelids, unblock the Meibomian glands and remove any stagnant oily secretions.

The main points of regular eyelid cleaning are:

- Warmth** - Warmth is used to break down the oil in the Meibomian glands and softens the skin and any crusts attached to the eyelids. The most successful method is a hot compress using a reusable bag device which can be heated in the microwave (can be purchased from any pharmacy). The other method is a hot flannel, but this needs to be constantly rewarmed in hot water to be effective. It should be applied for 5-10 minutes.
- Massage** - Massage should be done immediately after applying the warmth. Massaging along the length of the eyelids towards the eye (massage upper lid down and the lower lid up) with the eyes closed using comfortable pressure. Massage for 30 seconds and repeat 5–10 times after warming the eyelids. This helps to push the oil out of the glands.
- Clean** - Clean the eyelids following the warming and massage. Clean the eyelid edges with a clean cotton ball moistened with a bicarbonate of soda solution or a baby shampoo solution. Alternatively, ready-made eyelid cleaning wipes may be used, which can be obtained from any chemist. Use a side-to-side motion to remove the debris from the eyelid edges and eyelashes.

It may take up to *six weeks* for the symptoms of Blepharitis to improve once the eyelid cleaning regime has begun, so perseverance is essential.

Eyelid cleaning should be performed *at least twice a day*, morning, and evening, until the symptoms have settled. When the symptoms have gone, performing eyelid cleaning once a day, every day, may prevent further flare-ups.

Bicarbonate of Soda solution

Boil some water, and then let it cool to room temperature. Pour 100 mls (1/4 pint) of the water into a clean container. Dissolve one level teaspoon of bicarbonate of soda (not baking powder) in the water. Use as directed. Discard this solution immediately after use.

Baby shampoo solution

Boil some water in a kettle. Pour 100 mls (1/4 pint) of water into a clean container. Allow the water to stand until it is warm, and then mix two or three drops of baby shampoo into the water. Use as directed. Discard solution immediately after use.

Further advice

- Wearing eye make-up, particularly eyeliner, may make symptoms worse. It is best to avoid eyeliner, particularly during a flare-up of Blepharitis.
- Rubbing your eyelids may make inflammation worse, so try to avoid doing this.
- As mentioned above, blepharitis commonly develops in people with seborrheic dermatitis, rosacea, or dry eye syndrome. If relevant, treatment of these other conditions may also help to ease symptoms of blepharitis.
- There is some evidence to suggest a diet high in omega-3 fats can help to improve blepharitis. The best sources of omega-3s are oily fish, such as:
 - Mackerel
 - Herring
 - Fresh or frozen tuna – not canned, as the canning process sometimes removes the beneficial oils.

Aim to eat at least two portions of fish a week, one of which should be oily fish. Flaxseed oil Capsules can also be taken as an alternative source of omega 3.

When taking omega-3 fats, it has been stated that it can take between 6 to 12 months to see a definite effect.

Useful contacts

- Ask your pharmacist
- Ask an optician
- Patient UK - www.patient.co.uk
- NHS Choices, www.nhs.uk/conditions/

If you have further questions:

- *Call the practice on 01285 653184 or 01285 653122*
- If you require **urgent** medical advice, call 111 (24 hours)
- ***In an emergency call 999***