

# Blepharitis

## What is blepharitis?

Blepharitis is inflammation of the edges of the eyelids. They look crusty, flaky, and often red. This condition is very common. It does not usually affect your eyesight.

## How does it occur?

Causes of blepharitis include:

- bacteria, such as staphylococci, or other organisms
- dust, smoke, or other substances that cause allergies.
- a skin condition called rosacea.

Sometimes the cause is unknown.

Bacteria may cause crusts and particles to form along the eyelashes of some people but not others. People who have dandruff or oily skin are more likely to have blepharitis.

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms include:

- irritation, itching, or burning of the skin at the edge of the eyelid
- crusty deposits on the edge of the eyelid that flake off
- red eyelid edges
- matted eyelashes, especially in the morning
- lashes that fall out.

Sometimes the flakes fall from your eyelids into your eyes. Then your eyes may look red and feel irritated.

## How is it diagnosed?

Your doctor will examine your eyes using a magnifying instrument. He or she may also examine your scalp. Sometimes a sample of the deposits from your eyelids is sent to a lab to determine if bacteria are present.

## How is it treated?

Blepharitis can be difficult to treat. In general, treatment involves careful washing of your eyelids and lashes. You may need to follow a certain cleansing procedure for several weeks or months.

The cleansing procedure is as follows:

- Moisten a washcloth with warm water and hold it over both eyes for several minutes. This helps to soften any deposits on the eyelids. This can also help open up the tear glands and moisturize the eye.
- Add a few drops of baby shampoo to a cup of water. Moisten a cotton swab with this mixture. Using the swab, clean all the deposits from your lid margins and eyelashes. Do not pull the crusts off with your fingers. Use a new swab for each eye.

Your doctor will tell you how often you should follow the cleansing procedure.

Your doctor may prescribe ointment (with or without antibiotics) to help relieve your symptoms. After washing your lids and lashes, rub the ointment along the edges of your eyelids. Follow your doctor's instructions carefully.

Occasionally, you may need to take antibiotics in pill form.

## How long will the effects last?

For some people, blepharitis may never completely go away. For others, cleansing and medicine may cure the problem. Even when symptoms disappear, regular cleansing may help keep blepharitis from returning.