

Excessive Tearing

What is excessive tearing?

Excessive tearing is a condition in which tears spill out of your eyes even though you are not crying. Excessive tearing is also called watering eye or epiphora.

How does it occur?

The main causes of excessive tearing are:

- production of too many tears
- a blockage in the tear drainage system
- the eyelid is not in the right position (for example your eyelid sags or is turned outward).

Your body produces two types of tears:

- reflex tears (such as from crying or having something in your eye)
- lubricating tears, which coat the eyes with tear film all the time.

You may produce too many reflex tears because of:

- eye irritation, which may be caused by:
 - a foreign object in your eye (such as sawdust)
 - something in the air (such as smoke or smog)
 - something you are allergic to (such as pet dander)
 - an infection along the edges of your eyelids
- dry eye syndrome, when you do not produce enough lubricating tears.

You may have a blockage in your tear drainage system because:

- you were born with it
- you have scarring in your tear drainage system caused by:
 - an injury to your eyes or nose
 - long-term sinus infections
- the tiny openings (the puncta) of the tubes that connect your eyes and nose have become blocked due to aging, trauma, or infection
- some drugs cause a blockage (such as those used for chemotherapy)
- a problem with your eyelids keeps your tears from draining normally.

How is it diagnosed?

Your doctor will ask about your symptoms and examine your eyes, checking for irritation, injury, and infection. Your doctor will check your eyelids to see if they are blocking the tear drainage system.

Your doctor may use special eyedrops to show any problems with the surface of your eyes. Your eye doctor may use a probe to open the puncta to see if that solves the problem. You may need to have your sinuses checked to see if a blockage is causing the problem. Blocked sinuses may lead to excessive tearing.

How is it treated?

Treatment depends on the cause of the tearing. Your doctor may recommend one or more of the following treatments.

- If your tearing is caused by irritants such as allergens or pollutants in the air, use an air cleaner to help remove them from the air at work or at home.
- Use warm compresses and topical antibiotics to treat eye infections.
- Take oral antibiotics to treat sinus infections.
- Use artificial tears in the form of eyedrops or ointments to help relieve dry eye syndrome.
- Have surgery to remove a blockage in the tear drainage system. The type of surgery depends on the location and extent of the blockage. Some procedures can be performed in your doctor's office using local anesthesia. Tubes may be placed in your tear drainage system. Tiny funnels may be inserted into the puncta to keep them open. In a new procedure, the surgeon inserts a balloon on a catheter (tube) and inflates it to enlarge parts of the tear drainage system.
- Have surgery to correct the position of eyelids that block the tear drainage system.

How can I take care of myself?

- Always wear goggles or safety glasses at work or recreation where your eyes could be injured.
- Follow your doctor's instructions about using medicines to treat this problem.
- Have regular eye exams at least every 2 or 3 years.
- Wear sunglasses that protect your eyes from ultraviolet (UV) radiation.