

When Home Remedies for Dry Eyes Don't Bring Relief

You've tried the artificial tears from the pharmacy, you've moistened your home air with a humidifier, and you give yourself lots of "blink breaks" from the computer or TV screen. And still your eyes feel hot, scratchy and tired.

Your dry eyes may be a result of medications you're taking or another underlying medical condition like rheumatoid arthritis or rosacea, says ophthalmologist George McGinley, M.D., of Lehigh Valley Hospital and Health Network.

Whatever the cause, it's a good idea to see an eye specialist for an exam. The physician may be able to diagnose the problem just from hearing your symptoms and taking your medical history. Or, you may need one of the following tests:

- **Looking at your eye** through a special microscope known as a slit lamp to inspect the thickness and stability of the tear film.
- **Using a dye** to stain the cornea to see the condition of the cells there.
- **Measuring the amount of tears** with a Schirmer test—placing the end of a thin strip of filter paper inside your lower eyelids for five minutes. If you're one of those people who tears up because of the foreign object, the physician may numb the area with a topical anesthetic.

Depending on the specific diagnosis, your doctor may prescribe a topical ointment, eyedrops or oral antibiotics. Some people benefit from a minor surgical procedure to plug some of the tear ducts. This prevents tears from draining out so quickly.

Some other approaches you might try:

- Try using **hot compresses** on the eyes to get the tear glands flowing more readily.
- **Massage your eyelids with a little baby shampoo** to reduce the level of bacteria on the eyelid; bacteria can interfere with tear production.
- **Eat more foods that contain omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids**, like cold-water fish, flaxseed oil and fish oil supplements. A recent study shows this may help.
- Some people don't fully close their eyes at night when they sleep. **Taping the eyes shut or wearing a swim goggle-like moisture chamber** over their eyes helps prevent evaporation. These goggles also can be worn during the day to ease discomfort in dry environments.



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