

EYE HEALTHCARE

HAVE YOU GOT DRY EYES?

Probably the most common complaint heard by the optician is 'dry eyes'. It tends to affect the elderly, more so in women. But thankfully isn't sight threatening

The main symptoms are dryness, grittiness and redness which gets worse as the day goes on. Even although a person can have 'dry eye syndrome', there eyes can actually run excessive water, particularly when exposed to cold, windy and even sunny conditions. This in itself can be confusing – because the tears have activated by outside elements. It is the slow production, naturally flowing tears that are important, but unfortunately their rate of flow slows with age.

Tears are vital for eye lubrication and providing nutrients to the front of the eye. The equilibrium of tear quality and quantity needs to be maintained by properly functioning oil producing glands in the eye lids (which prevents the tears becoming too 'watery' and evaporating quickly). Tear quantity is controlled by the nervous system and hormonal changes which tend to affect it negatively with age.

Although there is no direct cure for 'dry eyes', using hot compresses (facecloth) has the effect of melting the 'waxy' plugs that block the oil producing glands. Regarding the depleted quantity issue, 'artificial tears' eyedrops can be used during the day, whereas a lubricating gel can be used at night. Good lid hygiene is important, regularly cleaning with cotton wool buds dipped in a weak suspension of baby shampoo. In more severe cases, 'punctal plugs' can be inserted.

General relief can be obtained from this annoying condition, but does require management at least several times daily. Remembering to blink plenty with concentration tasks is also imperative to prevent drying.

Noel McCrystal
BSc.(Hons.)MCOptom.Dip.Sc.V MASv.P

Scotch Street Centre
T: 028 87722379
www.mccrystalopticians.com