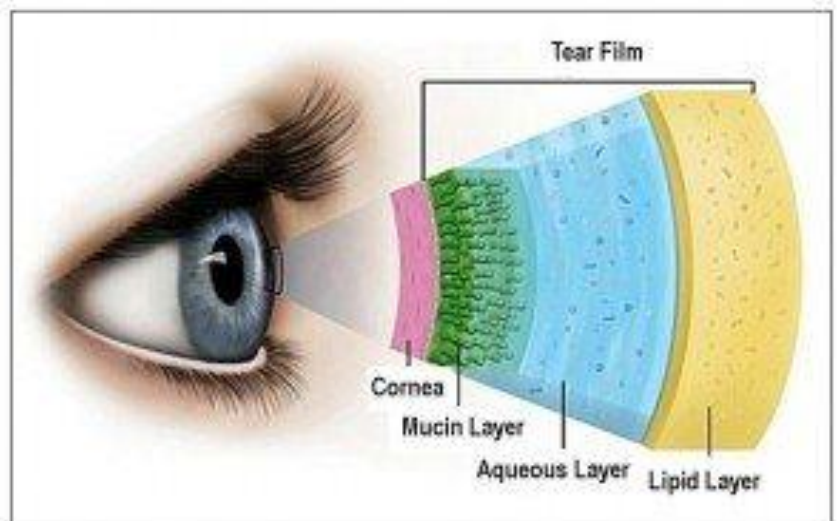


Why Are My Eyes Dry and Itchy?



Why Do My Eyes Feel Dry and Itchy?

Do your eyes sometimes feel scratchy, gritty, or irritated — like there's something in them? Maybe they water a lot, burn, or feel tired at the end of the day? **These are common signs of dry eye**, a condition that affects millions of people. While occasional dryness is normal, ongoing dryness and itchiness can be uncomfortable and may signal a problem with the tear film that keeps your eyes healthy.



What Causes Dry Eyes?

Your eyes are kept moist by a thin layer of tears that covers the surface.

This tear film is made up of three parts:

- An oily layer that prevents tears from evaporating too quickly
- A watery layer that provides moisture and nutrients
- A mucus layer that helps tears spread evenly across the eye

When any part of this system doesn't work properly — or when your eyes don't make enough tears — the surface of your eye can become dry and irritated.



Common Causes of Dry Eye Include:

- **Aging:** Tear production often decreases with age, especially after age 50.
- **Screen time:** Staring at computers, phones, or TVs can make you blink less often, allowing tears to evaporate.
- **Environment:** Dry air, wind, air conditioning, and heating can dry out your eyes.
- **Contact lenses:** Wearing contacts for long hours can disrupt the tear film.
- **Certain medications:** Antihistamines, antidepressants, and blood pressure drugs can reduce tear production.
- **Health conditions:** Diseases such as diabetes, thyroid problems, or autoimmune conditions (like rheumatoid arthritis or Sjögren's syndrome) can cause dryness.
- **Hormonal changes:** Many women notice dry eyes during menopause or pregnancy.

Why Do My Eyes Itch?

Itching is often caused by **eye allergies** — sometimes called allergic conjunctivitis. This happens when your eyes react to substances like pollen, pet dander, mold, or dust mites. When allergens come into contact with your eyes, your body releases histamine, causing redness, itching, and watering.



Sometimes, dryness and allergies occur together — dry eyes can make your eyes more sensitive to allergens, while allergies can make dryness worse. This can lead to a cycle of irritation that needs careful management.



Common Symptoms of Dry or Itchy Eyes

- Stinging, burning, or scratchy sensation
- Redness or irritation
- Watery eyes (a reflex to dryness)
- Blurred or fluctuating vision
- Feeling like there's grit or sand in your eyes
- Light sensitivity
- Trouble wearing contact lenses comfortably

If your symptoms last for weeks or interfere with daily life, it's important to see your optometrist for a proper diagnosis and treatment plan.



How Can I Relieve Dry and Itchy Eyes?

1. Blink More Often

When using screens, try the 20-20-20 rule — every 20 minutes, look at something 20 feet away for 20 seconds. This helps you blink more and keep your eyes moist.

2. Use Artificial Tears

Lubricating eye drops, also called artificial tears, can provide quick relief. Choose preservative-free types for frequent use, as preservatives can sometimes worsen irritation.

3. Control Your Environment

Use a humidifier to add moisture to dry indoor air. Avoid sitting directly under air vents or fans. When outdoors, wear sunglasses to protect against wind and sun.

4. Manage Allergies

If allergies are the main problem, try avoiding triggers and using antihistamine eye drops or oral allergy medication as recommended by your doctor. Don't rub your eyes — it only makes itching worse.

5. Take Breaks from Contact Lenses

If you wear contact lenses, give your eyes a rest by wearing glasses part of the day. Your optometrist might suggest switching to lenses designed for dry eyes.

6. Eat for Eye Health

Foods rich in omega-3 fatty acids (like salmon, flaxseed, and walnuts) can improve the oil layer of your tears and help reduce dryness over time.

7. Review Your Medications

If you suspect a prescription or over-the-counter medication is making your eyes dry, talk to your doctor — there may be alternatives.

When to See an Eye Doctor

If dryness or itching doesn't improve with simple measures, schedule an eye exam. Your optometrist can check tear quality, look for signs of inflammation, and rule out other eye conditions. In some cases, prescription eye drops, warm compresses, or tiny plugs that slow tear drainage (called punctum plugs) can help keep moisture in your eyes longer.



In Summary

Dry and itchy eyes are common and can have many causes — from everyday screen time to allergies or medical conditions. Simple steps like using artificial tears, blinking more often, and controlling your environment can make a big difference. But if symptoms persist, see your optometrist for advice and treatment. Healthy, comfortable eyes will help you see — and feel — your best every day.