

## Tear supplements

There are many types of 'artificial tears', ranging from thin drops to gels and ointments. Thin drops are best for mild dryness, while ointments are beneficial for more severe cases. Some drops come in multi-dose bottles and will keep for up to a month after opening as they contain preservatives. Drops without preservatives are more gentle on the surface of the eye, especially if used often, but are more expensive and must be used within one day of opening.

The choice of tear supplements can be quite overwhelming. Your pharmacist, optometrist or ophthalmologist will give you advice on which drops are best for you. For more information see [www.drmalcolmmckellar.co.nz/artificialtears](http://www.drmalcolmmckellar.co.nz/artificialtears)

## Prescription medicines

### Anti-inflammatories

Dry eyes are often inflamed and may respond to non-steroidal, steroidal or cyclosporine eye drops. These are available on prescription from your optometrist or ophthalmologist. Patients taking steroid eye drops require close monitoring.

### Doxycycline

Doxycycline is a tablet that reduces eyelid inflammation, improves oil gland function and helps repair the surface of the eye. Your family doctor, optometrist or ophthalmologist can provide a prescription.

## Advanced care

### Silicon plugs

Optometrists and ophthalmologists can reduce the drainage of tears from the eye with small silicon plugs.

### Eyelid position

Abnormalities of the eyelid or eye surface may need to be corrected by an ophthalmologist.

### Serum eye drops

Severe dry eye that fails to respond to all other treatments can be helped with eye drops made from a patient's own or donated blood. These are usually prescribed by specialised ophthalmologists when other treatments haven't worked.

# Eyes feeling dry?



## Help for those whose tears don't work

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## Do you have dry eyes?

If your eyes feel dry from time to time you're not alone. Most people experience some dryness when they're tired, stressed, studying or working in air conditioned environments. In most cases rest or tear supplements are enough to resolve the problem.

However if you're suffering from more severe dryness you may need different treatment.

## Symptoms

As well as feeling dry, some people also describe burning, grittiness, soreness, redness, blurred vision, sensitivity to light, and feeling as if there's a foreign body in their eyes.

## Causes

Dryness can be caused by:

- Increased tear evaporation
- Low tear production
- Abnormal tear spreading
- A combination of the above

### Increased tear evaporation

Your eyelids naturally secrete oil, which mixes with your tears and reduces the amount of evaporation. However, if your eyelids are inflamed they produce poor quality oil and your tear evaporation increases. This is the commonest cause of dry eye.

### Low tear production

Some people simply don't make enough tears. This is more common in the elderly and those who have rheumatoid arthritis. Low tear production can also be caused by pregnancy and menopause, hormone replacement therapy, antihistamines, anti-depressants and diuretics.

### Abnormal tear spreading

If you don't blink fully or the surface of your eye is irregular this prevents your tears spreading normally over your eye, leaving dry areas.

## Diagnosis

Your optometrist or ophthalmologist will examine your eye and eyelids, and may also carry out a number of tests to diagnose the cause of your dry eyes.

## Treatment

Dry eye can't be cured but most patients can expect significant improvement. The key to improving symptoms is treating the cause. If you have poor tear production then your tear volumes need to be increased. However if you have too high a level of evaporation then the function of the your eyelid oil glands needs to be improved.

## Simple treatments

### Environment

Most people benefit from wearing wrap around glasses, avoiding air conditioning and using humidifiers. Unfortunately drinking more water doesn't seem to help.

### Warmth

Warming the eyelids improves the oil layer of the tears. This can be done with flannels, steam baths or heated goggles.

### Massage

Pressure on the eyelids improves the flow from the oil glands. Your optometrist or ophthalmologist can do this for you, and teach you how to do it yourself.

### Omega-3

Omega-3 is a naturally occurring anti-inflammatory and one of the essential components of the oily layer of the tears. Many people do not have enough Omega-3 in their diet and benefit from eating more fish or taking flax seed or fish oil capsules.

