



Media Contact:

Valerie Rinaldi  
DeVries Public Relations  
(212) 891-0479  
vrinaldi@devries-pr.com

## **CHRONIC DRY EYE: Nothing to Shed a Tear About**

*– Disease Overview –*

- **Chronic dry eye affects millions of Americans and is one of the most common reasons that people visit their eye doctor<sup>1,2</sup>**
- **Chronic dry eye strikes more than 3.2 million Americans age 50 and older<sup>3</sup>**
- **One of the largest groups of people affected by chronic dry eye is menopausal women<sup>4</sup>**
- **If left untreated, it can lead to increased risk of infection and visual impairment<sup>5</sup>**
- **Nearly 4 out of 10 (37%) Americans experience symptoms of dry eye on a regular basis<sup>6</sup>**

### **What is chronic dry eye?**

Chronic dry eye occurs when your eyes do not produce the right quantity or quality of tears. The main functions of tears are to lubricate the eyes and protect them from bacteria and environmental irritants such as dust. This requires both the right amount of tears and a balance of the many components that make up tears.<sup>7</sup>

### **What causes dry eye?**

Chronic dry eye is often caused by hormonal changes associated with aging (e.g., menopause), environmental factors or medical conditions such as diabetes.<sup>8,9</sup>

Chronic dry eye begins when the surface of the eye becomes irritated (which can be caused by a decrease in tear production in the eyes due to the hormonal changes of menopause, allergens, etc.). This eventually results in “abnormal” tears – either not enough tears and/or tears that are not the right quality to protect and lubricate the eye.

Dry eye can also be caused or aggravated by a number of external factors such as hot, dry or windy environments, high altitudes, heating, air-conditioning and smoke. Many people also find their eyes become irritated when reading or working on a computer.

Contact lens wearers may also suffer from dryness, causing proteins to collect on the surface of the lens. Certain medications, thyroid conditions, vitamin A deficiency and diseases such as Parkinson's and Sjögren's can also cause dryness.

### **How do I know if I have dry eye?**

If your eyes are dry or if you have symptoms such as blurred vision, itchiness and sensitivity to light or if you have been using over-the-counter eye drops with little success, you may have chronic dry eye due to decreased tear production. Some chronic dry eye patients are sensitive to light, extreme heat or air-conditioning. Dryness can make wearing contact lenses difficult or impossible<sup>10</sup> and ordinary tasks like using a computer or reading often become painful.

Though a large percentage of Americans suffer from chronic dry eye, it is more common among certain groups of people. They include:

- Post-menopausal woman
- Older persons, because tear production decreases with age
- People who live in high altitudes or sunny, dry, windy conditions because of increased tear evaporation
- Persons with an auto-immune condition (e.g., Sjögren's, Lupus, Diabetes, Rheumatoid Arthritis)
- Computer users because they blink less when concentrating on the monitor
- Contact lens wearers because of the increased tear evaporation
- Smokers or people who are frequently around smokers

### **How is chronic dry eye diagnosed?**

Your eye doctor can check your eyes for the signs and symptoms of chronic dry eye. He or she may use several quick and painless tests to measure visual clarity, tear production, ocular surface dryness and damage to the cornea or conjunctiva (the membrane that lines the eyelids).

Some of the tests your doctor may use to determine the underlying cause(s) of your dry eye will measure the production, evaporation rate and quality of the tear film. Special drops that highlight problems that would be otherwise invisible are particularly helpful to diagnose the presence and extent of the dryness. These tests may help determine the severity of your condition.

### **How can I treat my dry eyes?**

There are over-the-counter eye drops and prescription therapies available to help address the condition. Your eye doctor (ophthalmologist or optometrist) can provide an accurate diagnosis and recommend which type of treatment is best for you.

## When should I talk to my eye doctor about my dry eyes?

You are encouraged to see your eye doctor if you regularly experience dryness, blurred vision, itchiness and sensitivity to light despite using eye drops.

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<sup>1</sup> Schein OD, Munoz B, Tielsch JM, Bandeen-Roche K, West S. Prevalence of dry eye among the elderly. *Am J Ophthalmol.* 1997;124:723-728.

<sup>2</sup> Moss et al. *Arch Ophthalmol.* 2000;118:1264

<sup>3</sup> Schaumberg D, Sullivan D, Buring J, Dana R. Prevalence of dry eye syndrome among U.S. women. *Am J Ophthalmol.* 2003;136:318-326.

<sup>4</sup> Schaumberg D, Sullivan D, Buring J, Dana R. Prevalence of dry eye syndrome among U.S. women. *Am J Ophthalmol.* 2003;136:318-326.

<sup>5</sup> Schaumberg D, Sullivan D, Buring J, Dana R. Prevalence of dry eye syndrome among U.S. women. *Am J Ophthalmol.* 2003;136:318-326.

<sup>6</sup> The 2002 Gallup Study of Dry Eye Sufferers. Multi-Sponsor Surveys, Inc. Princeton, NJ. October 2002.

<sup>7</sup> Lemp MA. Report of the National Eye Institute/ Industry Workshop on Clinical Trials in Dry Eyes. *CLAO J.* 1995;21:221-232.

<sup>8</sup> Stern ME, Beuerman RW, Fox RI, et al. The Pathology of Dry Eye: The interaction between the ocular surface and lacrimal glands. *Cornea.* 1998;17:584-589.

<sup>9</sup> Stern ME, Beuerman RW, Fox RI, et al. A Unified Theory of the Role of the Ocular Surface in Dry Eye. *Advances in Experimental Medicine and Biology.* 1998;438:643-51.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Lemp, MD. "Contact Lens Use in Dry Eye." *Refractive Eyecare for Ophthalmologists.* 9/2003