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**Queensland Eye Institute &  
Prevent Blindness Foundation**

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# Understanding Dry Eyes



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Dry eyes are a very common but potentially debilitating condition. There are many causes of dry eye, including – blepharitis, age, hormonal changes, medications, excess conjunctival tissue on the surface of the eye, auto-immune conditions such as Sjögren's syndrome, or simply primary dry eyes with no cause. Healthy tears are vital to your eyes functioning correctly. Your tears are a very important part of your eyes, immunity, cleaning system and optical pathway. When your eyes are dry you may experience:

Painful, sore gritty eyes

Blurred vision

Recurrent corneal infections or erosions

Persistent eye “fatigue”

A pressure feeling behind the eyes

“Watering” eyes

Remember that if you are dehydrated, your eyes will be as well. So make sure you drink plenty of water and avoid excessive tea and coffee.

Some of the other Treatments may include –

- Insertion of special “punctal plugs” to reduce the flow of tears out of your eyes. Dr Cronin uses a brand called “painless plugs” that are comfortable to insert and have a low rate of extrusion. You do not feel the punctal plugs once that are in.
- Reducing medications that can cause or exacerbate dry eyes.
- Treating a condition called Blepharitis, this is the most common cause of dry eye (this is covered in a separate handout)
- Use of specially compounded anti-inflammatory eye drops called cyclosporine in a condition called Sjögren's syndrome
- Taking high doses of Omega-3 fatty acids

This is not an exhaustive list but does cover many of the common treatments used. Treatment for dry eye is rarely a “quick fix” but with a holistic approach you can eventually have comfortable eyes and good vision again.

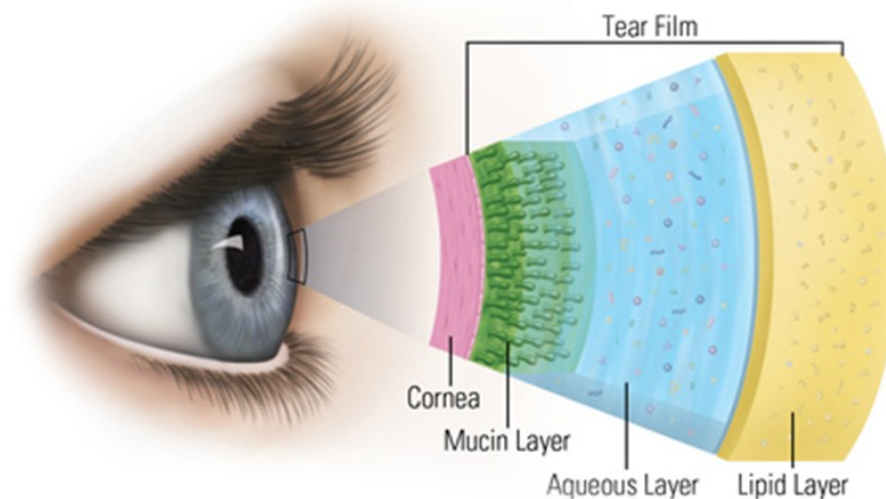




Follow these simple steps to help stop drying from your environment-

- Wear glasses or wraparound sunglasses when outside in the breeze, this will stop the wind blowing directly into your eyes.
- Ensure you are not near a fan or air-conditioning vent. The 'gentle' flow of air from heating or cooling systems is not gentle on your eyes – it can be very drying. Create a barrier between your eyes and the flow of air by moving your chair or desk. Consider using a pot plant if possible as it will help to raise the humidity in the area.
- Make an oasis! Florists use a product called oasis or floral foam in flower arrangements. It is great for creating a large surface area for water to evaporate and raise the local humidity. Put some oasis into a bowl of water with most of the oasis sitting out of the water. This will cause the water to evaporate and raise the humidity. You can still put real or artificial flowers in the foam to make it look appealing.
- Avoid smoking and smoky environments.

Artificial tears will work to both relieve your symptoms and also to improve the overall health of your tears. There are many different types of tear drops that vary in their viscosity, preservative formulation and other components. Dr Cronin will recommend drops that are best suited to you.

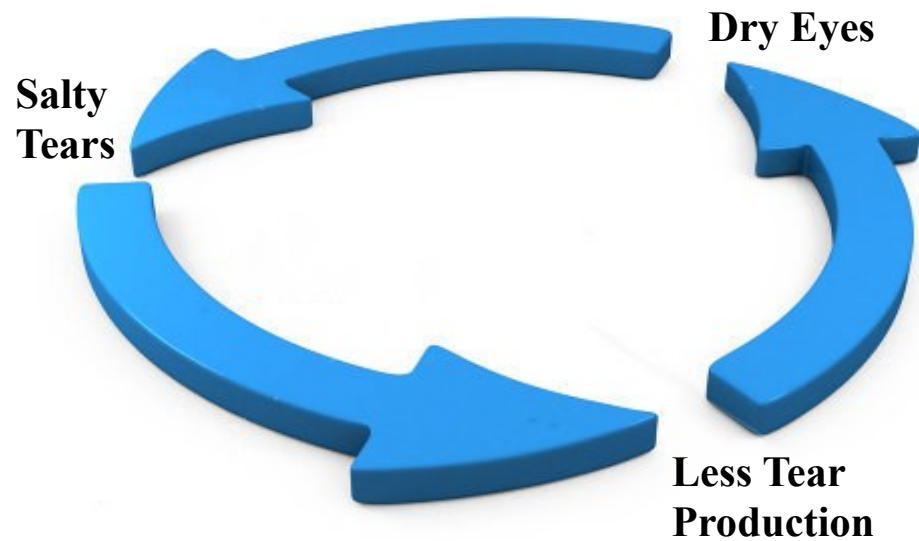


There are three important layers in our tears. They must all be present in balanced quantities for our tears to effectively moisturise the eyes. The innermost layer that sits against the cornea is the mucin layer. Next is the aqueous layer which is made of water and is secreted by the lacrimal gland. The outermost layer is made of oil and is secreted by the meibomian glands. It is generally the oil layer that is deficient in Blepharitis. Appropriate treatment of dry eye will help to restore all of the layers of the tear film to a normal healthy state so that you can return to having comfortable eyes again.



### **Dry Eyes Make Eyes Dryer**

When your eyes are dry, the tears become too salty. This high salt concentration can damage some of the cells on the surface of the eye that help to produce tears, thus making your eyes drier. It is important to use lubricating drops to reduce the salt concentration and break this cycle so that your eyes can have a chance to recover and return to a healthy comfortable state.



### **But my eyes are watery not dry!**

As strange as it may sound, this is one of the most common complaints in dry eye. When your tears are unhealthy, the 3 tear layers are not in the correct proportions. This can lead to there being more of the water layer and less of the oil layer. These “watery” (but not very effective) tears tend to trickle down your cheeks. Therefore the treatment is actually to make the tears healthier by restoring the 3 important layers to healthy proportions.

### **Treatment**

Control your environment!

The environment around you plays a very important role in dry eye treatment. Wind, fans, cold air-conditioning and warm heating all have a drying effect, which means that you will have excessive evaporation of your tears. Increasing the relative humidity and protecting your eyes from the direct flow of air will reduce the evaporation of your tears.