

Costco Connection

Eye drops, vision supplements, prescription glasses and contact lenses are available in Costco warehouses and at Costco.com.

Welcome tears



Lubricating eyes with artificial tears is the first line of defense against dry eye. Before you buy, understand the difference between artificial tears with preservatives and preservative-free artificial tears.

Artificial tears with preservatives come in multidose bottles. The chemicals inhibit the growth of bacteria after the bottle is opened but also may irritate the eyes. Preservative-free artificial tears, on the other hand, come in small, single-dose vials and contain fewer additives. Both are sold over the counter.

Optometrists recommend preservative-free drops for dry eye. Keeping them handy—near your computer, for example—will help you remember to use them frequently throughout the day. —JW

Prevent dry eyes

by JENNY WISNIEWSKI

Dry eye distress

Learn what causes the irritation and how you can relieve it

Have you ever experienced the sensation of having something in your eye, and it just won't let up? It may be more than a loose eyelash. A gritty feeling is one symptom of dry eye disease.

Dry eye occurs when your eyes do not produce enough tears or your tears don't work to correctly lubricate your eyes. Other symptoms include burning, redness, sporadic blurred vision and, paradoxically, increased tearing. If left untreated, dry eye can affect quality of life and, in rare, very severe cases, cause scarring on the cornea and a loss of vision.



Because dry eye results from a spectrum of underlying conditions, it is difficult to pinpoint how many Americans are diagnosed annually. However, researchers estimate that over 16 million Americans are currently living with diagnosed dry eye disease, according to a 2017 article in the *American Journal of Ophthalmology* (AJO).

Causes

Among those diagnosed with dry eye, 72% were over the age of 50 in one prevalence study published in the AJO. This is partially due to the fact that as people age they are more likely to take prescribed medications. Some of these medications—most notably chemotherapy and meds that treat high blood pressure, anxiety and depression—can lead to dry eye.

Women are at a higher risk for developing dry eye, in part due to hormonal changes. These changes can affect the quality and quantity of tear film, the layer of tear fluid on the eye's surface. Some autoimmune diseases, like psoriasis, rheumatoid arthritis and Sjögren's syndrome, contribute too. Loose eyelids—the drooping of the upper eyelids, most commonly found among older adults due to aging—are another contributor.

However, the younger population is not immune. Dr. John Conto, an optometrist at Froedtert Hospital and the Medical College of Wisconsin Eye Institute, saw an increase in diagnoses among teens and young adults during the pandemic, which he believes was linked to a rise in technology use.

Dr. Yuna Rapoport, a refractive, cataract and cornea specialist, and founder and director of Manhattan Eye, also sees a correlation between screen usage and dry eye. "When we are [looking at electronic screens] we forget to blink," she says. "The typical blink rate is 18 times a minute, and when we are on a screen it drops to four to six times a minute. This causes our corneas to dry out."

Cosmetic treatments like eyelash extensions, eyelash growth serums, extreme Botox treatments and eyelid tattoos can also bring on dry eye. Some products are not tear-gland safe, Conto stresses, and are not always applied properly.

Treating symptoms

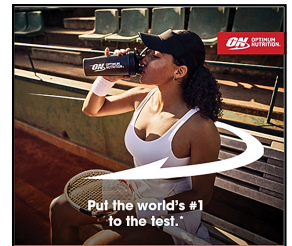
If you are experiencing eye dryness, start by using preservative-free, over-the-counter artificial tears. Be sure to use them consistently throughout the day. If your eyes are not relieved, schedule an appointment with your optometrist or ophthalmologist. If you are diagnosed with dry eye, possible treatments include a tear-producing medication like lifitegrast (Xiidra) or cyclosporine (Restasis), tear duct plugs or, in rare cases, surgery.

In the majority of cases, dry eye is a pesky problem requiring a minor addition to your daily routine. With the consistent use of artificial tears, most people find themselves feeling—and seeing—like their old selves.

Jenny Wisniewski is a freelance writer based in Milwaukee.

Controlling your environment and maintaining a balanced diet can help keep dry eye away. Try these tips:

- When outside in the wind, wear protective or wraparound sunglasses.
- Use an air purifier or humidifier in your home.
- Add omega-3 to your daily diet.
- If you spend a lot of time staring at a computer screen, remember to look away from the screen frequently, and blink your eyes.—JW



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by SARA CHANA SILVERSTEIN

Schooled in herbs

Some herbs may help with back-to-school stress and illness