

Blepharitis: Swelling of the Eyelid

A very common eye disorder, blepharitis is a condition affecting the eyelids around the eyelash area. Causes can range from a bacterial infection (staphylococcal blepharitis), allergies, lice and/or abnormal fat production in the eyelids (seborrheic blepharitis).

Symptoms

The swelling and inflammation around and at the edges of the eyelids can cause one or more of the following symptoms in and around the eyes:

- dandruff-like flaking
- crusty layer of dried discharge
- swelling and puffiness
- redness (bloodshot eyes and eyelids)
- irritation (discomfort)
- burning
- grainy/coarse sensation under the eyelid (foreign body sensation)

Treatment

Blepharitis can generally be diagnosed by a slit lamp (microscope) exam in your ophthalmologist's office.

Using a nonirritating topical antibiotic and/or a reduced-strength corticosteroid are effective treatments for most cases.

Good hygiene practices such as frequent cleansing of the eyelids with a clean washcloth, warm water and, in some cases, mild soap (baby no tears formula) can prevent the build up of bacteria and remove the crusty discharge. Your doctor may prescribe a more powerful lid scrub if simple cleansing does not help.

Coating the eyelashes with petroleum ointment to suffocate the larvae can treat blepharitis that is caused by lice.

Ineffective treatment or lack of treatment for blepharitis may lead to the development of an abscess within the eye called a sty, or a firm nodule called a chalazion. Both can be uncomfortable and hard to treat.