Dry Eyes and Menopause

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Coping With a Lesser-Known Menopause Symptom: Dry Eyes

You probably know that menopause sometimes causes night sweats and hot flashes. But did you know that it can cause dry eyes too?

The same hormonal changes that precipitate skin changes and vaginal dryness may also cause dry eyes. Fortunately, there are remedies which can prevent and relieve this annoying, uncomfortable condition.

You are likely to suffer from dry eyes and experience more severe symptoms if you undergo menopause at an early age. Dry eyes are especially likely to occur if early menopause is due to medication, such as chemo therapy, or surgical removal of your ovaries.

Symptoms of Dry Eyes

Symptoms may vary, but include:

- Feeling that you have a foreign body in your eye
- Your eye tissues may feel gritty, as if you have sand in them.
- You may experience blurring of vision.
- Your eyes may become increasingly sensitive to smoke, perfumes, pollen, and other environmental irritants and toxins.
- Despite the term “dry eyes,” your eyes may actually water quite a bit, especially when exposed to sunlight, computer screens, or irritants in the air.
- You may see better and worse intermittently.
- Stringy mucus may be produced.
- Redness, burning, and irritation are common.

Symptoms of dry eyes are made worse by exposure to dry and windy weather. Extremely cold temperatures, air conditioning, and fans may cause irritation. Fatigue and eyestrain worsen discomfort associated with dry eyes.

What Causes Dry Eyes?

Changes in levels of estrogen and progesterone that occur during menopause are often responsible for dry eyes in women.

While dry eyes may occur in anyone, at any age, the condition is most likely to be diagnosed among menopausal and post-menopausal women, and people who suffer from certain health conditions, such as auto-immune diseases.

Many medications cause eye dryness. Steroidal, anti-arthritic, and immune suppressant drugs cause dry eyes, as

do medications used to relieve menopause allergies, Parkinson’s disease, high blood pressure, and inflammation.

Natural Ways to Prevent and Treat Dry Eyes

Contact lenses may be uncomfortable, so you may need to wear glasses instead. However, there are contact lenses available designed for people who suffer from dry, irritated eyes.

Stay out of windy, dry environments. Wear good quality sunglasses when you are outside. Consider purchasing a humidifier if your home is dry. Do not sit directly in front of fans, heating ducts, fireplaces, or air conditioners. Use care when drying your hair. The heat and wind from hair dryers may be irritating to your eyes.

Make sure that you stay hydrated. To determine how much fluid you should be drinking in a day, divide your weight in pounds by two, and drink that many ounces. For example, if you weigh 140 pounds, drink at least 70 ounces of liquids daily.

Limit your intake of caffeinated beverages, such as coffee and cola, as caffeine is drying. Herbal, black and green teas are better alternatives. While green and black teas contain caffeine, they also contain compounds that enhance the health of your eyes.

Do not smoke. Stay away from smoky environments, fireplaces, woodstoves, and campfires.

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Herbs, Vitamins, and Supplements that Prevent and Treat Dry Eyes

Herbs and foods rich in phytochemicals can be very effective for relieving all symptoms of menopause, including dry eyes. Some herbs may be used to lubricate the tissues of your eyes, relieve redness, and soothe discomfort.

Calendula and eyebright are gentle herbs that may be made into herbal eyewashes or compresses. Herbs used internally to relieve menopausal symptoms include black cohosh, dong qui, chaste berries, soy, and red clover.

Supplements rich in omega-3 fatty acids may reduce inflammation and improve your comfort level. You must take them consistently for several months in order to benefit. Fish, flax, hemp, krill, black current, borage, and evening primrose oils are all excellent sources of omega 3 fatty acids as well.

In addition to relieving dry eyes, these oils improve cardiovascular and joint health. They are important supplements for all women who are menopausal or post-menopausal. I recommend that 1000 milligrams of evening primrose oil be taken three times daily for the treatment and prevention of dry eyes.

A good quality multivitamin/multi-mineral formula should be taken. I recommend the use of vitamin/mineral combinations designed for women or eye health. Check to ensure that your supplement provides 25,000 IU of vitamin A. It should also contain lutein, carotenoids, and zeaxanthin, nutrients which support the health of your eyes. Bilberry is beneficial as well, as it enhances eyesight.

Dark red or purple fruits and vegetables contain nutrients essential for healthy eyes. Eat them daily. Blueberries, beets, blackberries, plums, and dark colored grapes are excellent choices.

Yellow and orange vegetables and fruits contain rich stores of vitamins A and C, which are essential for healthy eyes. Carrots, squash, oranges, sweet potatoes, and pumpkin are just a few of the many yellow and orange fruits and vegetables which contain nutrients that are beneficial for healthy eyes.

Topical Remedies for Dry eyes

If your eyes are irritated, place warm moist cloths, tea bags, or slices of cucumber over your closed eyes for several minutes. These remedies provide soothing comfort, and hydration. They give your eyes a chance to rest. The tea bags may be applied warm or cool.

Cucumber slices and tea bags will relieve puffiness around your eyes in addition to relieving discomfort.

Over the counter, homeopathic, herbal, and prescription eye drops are available. Many eye experts recommend the use of eye gels or ointments over regular drops as they may be effective for a longer period of time.

Do not use drops created for allergy sufferers or products that contain medication which eliminates redness. These products can increase dryness. Lubricating products are the best options. Consult with your eye care professional or experiment with different products to see what ones work best for you.

Keep your hands away from your eyes. If applying drops or compresses, wash your hands carefully prior to and after administration of the treatment. If you place medication in your eyes, do not allow the applicator to touch the eye. If it makes contact with your eye, throw the product away so that you will not get an eye infection.

Professional Treatment of Dry Eyes

Several prescription medications are available that relieve dry eyes. Ask the prescriber about possible side effects before you use them.

If the dry eye condition is severe, you may opt for surgery to gain relief.

Keep Your Eyes Healthy

Take breaks and look up frequently when engaged in activities that cause eyestrain. See your eye care professional at least annually.

If you have excessive redness, experience sharp pain, have drainage from your eyes, or visual changes, notify your health care provider. These may be signs of infection or serious eye diseases.