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Blepharitis ("Granulated Eyelids")

Blepharitis, often referred to as "granulated eyelids" because of their appearance, is simply an inflammation of the outer edges of the eyelids where the eyelashes originate (the eyelid margins). It is a common condition that may never totally go away, but it can be controlled by treatment. To keep it under control, you will have to devote some time and effort in its care. If you don't it will probably recur, which is why it is also called "chronic blepharitis".

Symptoms

Crusts form on the eyelids margins and are continually flaking off. If they fall into your eyes, they can be irritating and cause a foreign body sensation, as well as make the eyes look bloodshot. The edges of your eyelids may stay red much of the time. Making it look as if you have been crying. Sometimes the lids itch, and you may want to pick at the crusts to relieve the itching.

What Causes Blepharitis?

Blepharitis can be caused by a number of infectious organisms, though in most cases it is related to seborrhea, a common condition of the skin and hair known as "dandruff". It is not caused by a need for glasses, although if you do need glasses and tend to rub your eyes this could add to the likelihood of lid infections. Blepharitis itself does not affect your eyesight.

Examination

The outer and inner surfaces of your eyelids will be examined under magnification with a slit lamp (clinical microscope). Sometimes samples of the crust are sent for laboratory tests, but the condition is so very common that the diagnosis is usually apparent from examining the lids and your scalp.

Treatment

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1. Wash your hands with soap and water; rinse well and dry them.
2. While looking in the mirror, moisten a cotton swab (Q-tip) with warm tap water (adding a few drops of baby shampoo if prescribed) and gently "tease" and clean all the crusts from the edge of your eyelids and the eyelashes. Do not pull the crusts off with your fingers, as this increases the risk of infection. Be careful not to scratch your eye accidentally with the wash.
3. When all the crusts are cleaned off:
 - a. Put two drops of your prescribed medication into each eye. Do not wipe away the excess that runs out, but use another swab to rub it into the edge of the lid and eyelashes. Let it dry there and remain all day don't wash it off.
 - b.) If an ointment medication was prescribed, rub a thin layer into the eyelid margin with a cotton swab at night before going to bed. Repeat this procedure two or three time a day for 7 to 10 days.

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Because the eye drops may contain a cortisone compound (steroid) along with an antibiotic, it is important that you do not use them for any longer than the prescribed treatment period. Such drops can cause serious side effects, their use must be carefully monitored.

Do not use mascara or eyeliner during this time. After the blepharitis has cleared up, you may start again, but use fresh containers and brushes.

Most people with dandruff-related blepharitis benefit from treating their scalp at the same time. If an anti-seborrhea shampoo has been prescribed as part of your treatment, use it on your scalp(following label directions) on the day you start using the eye drops, and again one week later. If you have crusts or flakes on your eyebrows, use the shampoo on your brows as well. Do not use the shampoo on your eyelashes and be careful not to get it in your eyes. Once crusting has cleared up, you may be able to prevent future recurrences by continuing to use the anti-seborrhea shampoo about once a month.

If you have been putting Vaseline or other petroleum ointment on the edge of your lips, it is a good idea to stop. Although it may help at first, it may also contribute to the formation of more crusts.

If your blepharitis is severe, you may be given a one to two week course of treatment with an oral antibiotic medication (tetracycline).

Very occasionally, chronic blepharitis does not clear up with any prescribed treatment. In that case, all you can do is make an effort to control it by removing the crusts everyday with warm water and cotton swab. You should try to keep them from accumulation to the point that they keep your eyes chronically irritated.