

## **SYMPTOMS, CAUSES, AND TREATMENT OF DRY EYE**

*Avoid suffering from this common and often chronic condition this winter season*

**MADISON, Wis.** – Do your eyes commonly tear, itch, or burn? Do they feel irritated and show redness? Have you experienced a gritty sensation or a feeling of something in your eyes? If these symptoms sound familiar and you answered “yes,” you could be one of the many Americans who suffer from dry eye.

### **What is dry eye, and why does it occur?**

Dry eye is a condition where tears lack sufficient moisture and lubrication, which is necessary to maintain good eye health and clear vision. Tears not only wash away dust, but also soothe the eyes, provide oxygen and nutrients to the cornea, and help defend against eye infections by removing harmful bacteria.

People with dry eyes either do not produce enough tears, or their tears are of a poor quality. Tears are produced by several glands in and around the eyelids. Tear production tends to diminish with age, with various medical conditions, or as a side effect of certain medicines. Environmental conditions such as windy and dry climates can also decrease tear volume due to increased tear evaporation. Also, if the tears evaporate too quickly or do not spread evenly over the cornea due to deficiencies with the tear layers, dry eye symptoms can develop as a result of poor tear quality.

This condition can certainly be prevalent this time of year, when the air turns cold and dry. While dry eye has a multitude of causes, the condition generally stems from the following factors:

- **Age:** As Americans age, eyes naturally become drier. Typically, people older than 65 experience some dry eye symptoms.
- **Gender:** Women are more likely to develop dry eye due to hormonal changes during pregnancy, from using oral contraceptives, and following menopause.
- **Medications:** Decongestants, antihistamines, and antidepressants can reduce tear production and increase the likelihood for dry eye.
- **Medical Conditions:** Health issues associated with arthritis, diabetes, and thyroid problems can lead to dry eye symptoms.
- **Environment:** Dry climates and exposure to wind and smoke may trigger dry eye.
- **Eyewear/Surgery:** Contact lenses may cause dry eye or make eyes less comfortable if they are dry, and some eye surgeries may lead to a temporary decrease in tear production.
- **Cosmetics:** When the lid margin is coated with heavy makeup, it can block the openings of the oily glands which help lubricate the eye.

### **Diagnosis and Treatment of Dry Eye**

Dry eye can be diagnosed in a comprehensive eye examination. Your eye doctor can test for the quantity and quality of tears during an exam and prescribe or recommend artificial tear drops, ointments, or capsules which can be used to help stimulate or maintain tear production and guard against future tear loss. The Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA) recommends the following to reduce dry eye symptoms: Remember to blink regularly when reading or staring at a computer screen for long periods of time; increase the humidity in the air, at work and at home; wear sunglasses outdoors to reduce exposure to cold, dry winter air and wind; and avoid becoming dehydrated by drinking plenty of water (8 to 10 glasses) each day. WOA strongly recommends consulting your licensed eye doctor to ensure proper diagnoses and treatment, and be sure to receive your annual eye exam. To find an optometrist in your area, please visit <http://www.woa-eyes.org/members>.

### **About the Wisconsin Optometric Association**

*The Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA) is a nonprofit affiliation of licensed doctors of optometry and associated businesses dedicated to the preservation and enhancement of the vision welfare of the people of Wisconsin. The WOA accomplishes its goals through: education and dissemination of information, organized governmental activity, legislation and regulation, mediation with consumer and public interest groups, and provision of collective benefits to its members. Over 620 doctors of optometry are currently members of the WOA, located in nearly every county in the state. All members must be licensed to practice optometry by the State of Wisconsin. For more information, visit WOA's website at [www.woa-eyes.org](http://www.woa-eyes.org).*