

## Eyelid hygiene advice for blepharitis

This is the most important part of treatment and prevention. The aim is to soothe the eyelids, 'unplug' any blocked meibomian glands and clear out any stagnant oily secretions from these glands, and to clean the eyelids of debris. This is a daily routine that consists of three parts - warmth, massage and cleaning. Remove any contact lenses before the following routine.

### Warmth

The purpose of warmth is to soften the skin and any crusts attached to the eyelids. But also, to allow the oily secretions made by the meibomian glands to flow more freely. As with any type of oil, warming the oil made by the meibomian glands will make the oil more 'runny'. Therefore, warmth helps to 'unplug' any blocked glands and allow the oily secretions to flow more readily. Warmth applied to the eyelids for about five minutes is thought to do this.

The traditional method is to gently press on the eyelids with a flannel (facecloth) soaked in very warm water for 5-10 minutes. If the flannel cools, keep re-warming it in the warm water.

A popular alternative is to use a specially designed heat bag which you place over your eyes for about five minutes. For example, the EyeBag™ which you can buy from certain opticians / optometrists or online. To get the heat bags hot you place them in a microwave for a short time. The advantage of a heat bag over a hot flannel is that the heat is retained for many minutes and so it keeps a constant warmth over the eyes. You can simply lie down and relax for five minutes with the bag placed over your eyes. (A hot flannel usually cools quickly.)

### Massage

Massage the eyelids immediately after applying the warmth. Massaging helps to push out the oily fluid from the tiny meibomian glands. To massage the eyelids...

- Use your index or middle finger and sweep the pad (fingertip) of that finger from the inner corner of the eye along the eyelid to the outer corner of the eye.
- Start with the upper lid. Put the finger pad in the corner of the eye next to the nose, just resting on the eyelid above the lashes. Then sweep the finger gently but firmly along the eyelid to the outer end.
- Repeat this with the lower lid, placing the pad of the finger just below the lashes in the corner of the eye and sweeping outwards towards the temple.
- Repeat this sweeping massage action 5 to 10 times over about 30 seconds immediately following the warming.
- Massaging should neither to be too gentle nor too firm. It should be relatively comfortable and you should not press hard enough to actually hurt your eyeball under the closed lids. Always massage with the eyes shut.

## Clean

After warmth and massage, clean the eyelids. This can be done by any of the following ways. There is a lack of research studies to say which is the best method, so use whatever you find most useful:

- The traditional way is to use a cotton wool bud that has been dipped in diluted baby shampoo. Just add a few drops of baby shampoo to a small cup of warm water so that the ratio of water to shampoo is about 10:1. Squeeze out excess liquid from the cotton bud to prevent drips getting into your eyes which may irritate. In particular, try to clean off any crusts at the base of the eyelids. After cleaning the eyelids with the cotton wool bud, wash off the shampoo from the eyelids with a flannel or cloth.
- Some people recommend using sodium bicarbonate (a teaspoonful in a cup of cooled water that has recently been boiled). This is applied using a clean cloth or cotton wool bud.
- Some people recommend using special eyelid scrubs that you can buy at some opticians / optometrists.
- Some people say that simply washing the eyelids with cooled water that has recently been boiled (or preserved water for contact lens wearers) is probably as effective as using water with added sodium bicarbonate or baby shampoo.

You should do the above routine - warmth, massage, clean - at least twice a day until symptoms settle. When the symptoms have eased, keep doing this routine once a day, every day, to prevent further flare-ups. If you are prone to blepharitis it is best to think of this as part of your daily routine - just like brushing your teeth. This is the best way to keep symptoms away, or to a minimum.