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Blepharitis

Acute infections of the eyelid—those that flare up with little or no warning—are irritating and can affect your vision. You may have symptoms such as itchy or burning eyes, blurred vision, gritty or granular sensations, or oily tears. These conditions are caused by either blepharitis, a medical term that means inflammation of the eyelid, or meibomianitis, inflammation of the oil-producing glands of the eye.

Blepharitis is usually caused by *Staphylococcus* bacteria that thrive in excess oil produced by the glands of the eyelid. Blepharitis sometimes accompanies outbreaks of acne. The inflammation may be worsened by tea or alcohol consumption and may become chronic. The essence of therapy is to prevent the infection from causing chronic symptoms or more serious problems.

Depending on the severity of your symptoms, we may prescribe any or all of the following therapies:

- 1. Warm or hot moist compresses applied to the eye.
- 2. Eyelid cleansing procedures. Although neither this nor hot compresses are a cure for infection, both actions help remove debris that has become trapped in the glands and eyelashes.
- 3. Manual expression of excess oil from the oil glands at the edges of the eyelids. Applying hot compresses before the expression usually helps the glands flow more freely and release trapped bacteria.
- 4. In more severe cases we may prescribe antibiotic eye drops. These may or may not be in combination with a corticosteroid, an antiinflammatory drug. Sometimes, instead of an antibiotic eye drop, antibiotic topical ointment is prescribed that should be applied along the edge of the eyelids. Oral antibiotics may also be used (a treatment usually reserved for special cases). Blepharitis can recur or remain chronic if not treated completely. Eyelid hygiene procedures are important in removing the bacteria that remain trapped in your lashes or lid areas of your eyes.

Directions for a Warm Soak of the Eyelids

- 1. Wash your hands thoroughly.
- 2. Moisten a clean washcloth with warm water.
- 3. Close the eyes and place the washcloth on the eyelid for approximately 5 minutes.
- 4. Repeat several times daily.

Directions for an Eyelid Scrub

- 1. Wash your hands thoroughly.
- 2. Mix warm water and a small amount of shampoo that does not irritate the eye (e.g., baby shampoo).*
- 3. Close one eye and use a clean washcloth (a different one for each eye) to rub the shampoo mixture back and forth across the eyelashes and the edge of the eyelid.
- 4. Rinse with cool, clear water.
- 5. Repeat on the other eye.
- * If the eye becomes red or painful, consult an eye care professional immediately.

