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Chalazia and Styes

Your eyelids are quite important. They protect your eyes from approaching objects and irritating particles in the air. When you blink, your eyelids help remove foreign objects and distribute tears, which lubricate your eyes. But sometimes your eyelids can have problems and need care. Two common conditions that affect your eyelids are chalazia and styes.

A **chalazion** results from a blockage of one or more of the small oil-producing glands (meibomian glands) found in the upper and lower eyelids. These blockages trap the oil produced by the glands and cause a lump on the eyelid that is usually about the size of a pea.

These are usually relatively painless, although in some cases you may appear to have a black eye. If the chalazion becomes infected, the eyelid can become swollen, inflamed, and more painful.

Styes are often confused with chalazia. Styes are infections or abscesses of an eyelid gland near an eyelash root or follicle. They generally occur nearer to the edge, or margin, of the eyelid than do chalazia, where they form a red, sore lump similar to a boil or pimple.

In some cases, both chalazia and styes may come to a head and drain on their own without treatment. However, in most instances they do not.

A chalazion may be treated by applying hot compresses and/or antibiotic eye drops.* In some cases, steroid drugs may be injected into or adjacent to the site of the chalazion. A chalazion may also be treated by surgical incision and drainage when necessary. Sometimes oral medications are prescribed.

Styes may also be treated with hot compresses.* Frequently, antibiotic and/or steroid eye drops or ointments may be needed.

Chalazia and styes most often respond well to treatment. If left untreated, however, they can be uncomfortable and unattractive and can lead to other problems. Chalazia and styes may recur. If this happens too frequently, your doctor of optometry may recommend additional tests to determine if other health problems may be contributing to their development.

Directions for Application of Hot Compresses

1. Wash your hands thoroughly.
2. Moisten a clean washcloth with hot water.*
3. Close your eyes and place the washcloth on the eyelid for approximately 10 to 15 minutes.
4. Remoisten the washcloth as necessary to keep it hot.
5. Repeat at least four times a day.

