Blepharitis

Almost everyone sooner or later experiences an occurrence blepharitis. Some people have to deal with this condition repeatedly and continually.

Blepharitis means "inflammation of the eyelid". This condition is associated with the following symptoms: itchy eyelid skin, especially near the eyelashes (the rim of the lid, called lid margin), redness, slight swelling and often dry or oily flaky areas. If this sounds a lot like acne, seborrhea and dandruff, that's because it is a closely related condition.

Blepharitis is caused primarily by a mechanical disruption in the process that allows the eyelid to be properly lubricated and moisturized (clogged oil glands in the eyelid) or can result from a contact allergy (eye make-up, insect bite, something on the fingers that touched the eyelid, etc.). Sometimes, blepharitis may be the result of a systemic immune system reaction. As the thin skin of the eyelid breaks down and causes flakes, the debris falls into the tears, sticks on the lid margin or eye lashes and causes an irritation and inflammatory reaction which further disrupts the lubrication system which causes more flaking and----the cycle continues, until you intervene.

Sometimes the continual irritation sets up a situation where staphylococcus bacteria can set up housekeeping, resulting in a true infection on top of the already compromised eyelid mechanical problem. The bacteria can infect the source gland deeper in the lid and then it is called a “stye.” More rarely, the route cause of the blepharitis is an initial bacterial invasion and secondary to the stye.

Blepharitis can be a one-time self limiting problem. The body fixes the condition in a day or so without intervention. It may come and go or become chronic and long lasting.

Treatment consists primarily of attending to eyelid hygiene. As blepharitis is most often a mechanical problem, manual intervention is required. This means washing the eyelids a few times each day with a cleanser (baby shampoo on washcloth or cotton swab, specially formulated “lid scrub” products) to remove flakes and scales, applying warm compresses to assist healing, (unclogging the oil glands) and providing drops, ointment or lotion to help maintain lubrication and skin pliability. If seborrhea is the route cause, careful attention to controlling the scalp condition is required. Treatment must continue until all symptoms resolve and remain clear for at least one week.

Sometimes, if a bacterial infection is present, treatment with antibiotic ointment, especially at bedtime, is recommended.

Should the condition return, it is best to begin treatment immediately. The sooner the problem is addressed, the more rapid the resolution.

Blepharitis is a condition that must be managed by diligent attention to personal hygiene on a regular basis. Examination by an eye doctor is necessary to confirm the proper diagnosis and
treatment for this condition. Then, it's up to you to stay with the treatment plan and keep your eyelids healthy!

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