

## Dry eye and the dog days of winter



Now that winter is upon us, people living in the colder parts of the country will spend a good amount of the time indoors in heated, dry environments. When they do head out into the cold, most people remember to protect their faces, hands, and feet with scarves, gloves, and boots but, often times, people forget about protecting their eyes. It is during this time of year when more people have more complaints about dry, red, itchy and watery eyes both indoors and outside.

The combination of cold, dry outdoor weather and warmer, more dry indoor weather can become a bigger trigger for dry eye symptoms because our tears evaporate faster in dryer environments. This is what can cause our eyes to feel gritty, dry, stuck together and irritated.

There are essentially two types of dry eye, one where there is low tear (also called aqueous) production, or when the tear quality is poor and the tears evaporate too quickly due to not enough oily secretion from the meibomian glands found in our eyelids. When we blink, our lids pull our tears evenly over the surface of our eye which keeps our cornea smooth, healthy and clear. The process of blinking is an important step for us to have clear, comfortable vision and healthy eyes. However, estimates show that approximately 5 million Americans age 50 and older suffer from dry eye and experience dry, irritated, burning, eyes.

There are four major eye conditions that people experience in colder weather:

Dry eyes – Cold weather and the wind can be very drying to your eyes. In extremely cold weather your eyes may be unable to produce the amount of tears you need to maintain comfort and visual clarity. During the winter months, most homes and offices have lower humidity levels due to radiant heat and closed windows.

What can you do?

Protect your eyes from wind and cold: Wear eye protection (eyeglasses, sunglasses or goggles) when outside., especially when it is very cold and windy. On windy days it is quite easy for dust, dirt and other particles to get in your eyes.

Use a humidifier in heated environments: This can help add some moisture back into the air and can help moisturize your eyes.

Start taking Omega-3 supplements: Increasing your intake of omega-3 as fish oil can help stimulate tear production.

Hydrate...Drink lots of fluids: Keeping your body hydrated will help maintain moisture in your eyes. Avoid caffeine and carbonated drinks that can further dehydrate you. Water is the best for hydrating. Adding hot soup to your diet is the perfect winter food for keeping you warm and help keep your eyes moist.

Lubricate your eyes: ask your optometrist which eye drops they recommend for your dry eye symptoms.

Medications: Some medications you may take have a side effect of causing drying (antihistamines, sleeping pills, pain relievers) by affecting your ability to produce tears. Speak to your physician if you develop symptoms with a new medication.

Excessive tearing – Another eye condition people can experience is excessive tearing on cold, windy days. This can be very annoying and cause vision to become blurry.

What can you do?

Protect your eyes from wind and cold: As mentioned above, this is the first step in protecting your eyes during the winter.

When tearing: avoid using your hands or fingers to wipe away tears as that can spread germs that can lead to eye infections. Use a clean tissue or cloth instead.

Burning eyes – in very cold, windy weather can be very painful causing redness, light sensitivity or lid spasms. If you are having difficulty opening your eyes, do not force it. Your eye surface (the cornea) can actually freeze and forcing your eye open can damage the eye surface.

What can you do?

Eye protection is key: Wear sunglasses or goggles to protect your eyes from extreme wind and temperature.

Contact your eye doctor immediately: If you are experiencing eye pain or a strong burning sensation

With the direction and treatment by your eye doctor, most cases of dry eye can be managed successfully. Colder weather definitely irritates already dry eyes and often times people who previously

had no symptoms will become of their dry eye during this time of year. Contact lens wearers tend to have more dry eye complaints during the cold, winter months as well.

Other steps you can take to lessen your discomfort, treat your symptoms and help keep your eyes healthy and for you to have clear, comfortable vision.

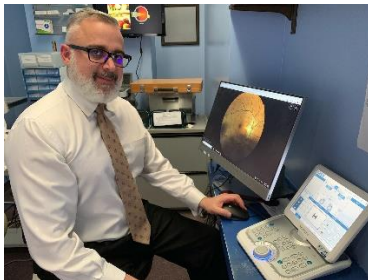
Clean your contacts more often or switch to one-day disposable contact lenses: Colder weather can increase the film on your contact lenses making your eyes feel even drier. Cleaning your contacts well or replacing them more frequently can help reduce your symptoms and lower your risk of infection.

Avoid have direct heat on your face and eyes: Initially, it might feel quite soothing to have warm air on your face especially when coming in from the cold, but heat blowing on your face dries up your facial moisture as well as the moisture in your eyes. In your car, turn the vents towards your lower body to prevent direct air from blowing on your eyes.

See your optometrist: Even infrequent bouts of dry eye can progressive to a more serious case. Early intervention is the best way to treat dry eye before it becomes more serious.

People suffering from dry eyes may experience itching, burning, red, tired eyes. Their vision may become blurred and they may experience light sensitivity.

Although dry eye cannot be cured, we can relieve symptoms with in-office treatments such as Mibo Thermoflo which gently delivers soothing heat to the impacted eyelid glands helping to improve your tear quality and help reduce or eliminate the signs and symptoms of dry eye disease. Improving eyelid gland function (called meibomian gland) is the mainstay of modern dry eye therapy.



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