

# Glaucoma and Dry Eye Disease

## What is Dry Eye Disease?

Dry eye disease (DED) is a common condition where the tear film does not smoothly coat the surface of the eye, causing symptoms.

**Some common causes** include older age, eyelid inflammation (called blepharitis), workplace exposures, seasonal allergies, systemic medications (e.g. antihistamines, antidepressants, diuretics), eye irritation from eye drops, and contact lens use. Rarely, genetic conditions can cause dry eyes.

**Symptoms** can include burning, irritation, itching, stinging, and the feeling of something touching the eye. The eyelids may get flakes and crusting if there is also blepharitis. There may also be discharge. The symptoms can negatively affect your quality of life and cause chronic eye irritation.

Dry eyes can be associated with systemic conditions, like rheumatologic disorders (e.g. Sjögren's syndrome, rheumatoid arthritis, systemic lupus erythematosus), thyroid disease, and Parkinson's disease.

## What is the association between dry eye disease and glaucoma?

Many patients with DED and glaucoma are diagnosed with each separately, because both are associated with increased age. In some studies, over half of patients with glaucoma were noted to have signs or symptoms of dry eye disease.

Also, many eye drops used to treat glaucoma may cause dry eye or make it worse. In particular, the preservative in these eye drops, benzalkonium chloride (BAK), can worsen DED symptoms.

Glaucoma surgeries such as trabeculectomy and glaucoma tube surgery can also alter the surface of the eye and the tear film, leading to dry eye symptoms.



## What are the glaucoma-specific risks of dry eye disease?

- Symptoms from DED may cause patients to avoid using their glaucoma eye drops. This can cause high eye pressure, worsening glaucoma, and vision loss.
- Changes in vision from DED can worsen the possibly poor vision already present from glaucoma.
- Dry eye disease may increase the risk of complications after glaucoma surgery.

## What are the glaucoma-specific risks of dry eye disease?

- Standard DED treatments include lubrication with artificial tears, ointment, and/or prescription eye drops, and treatment of blepharitis. You may also be offered punctal plugs, amniotic membrane therapy, or eyelid treatments.
- Changing glaucoma eye drops can also help dry eye symptoms. Strategies include finding eye drops that are less irritating, using combination drops, and switching to eye drops with gentler preservatives or eye drops that contain no preservatives.
- It is sometimes possible to reduce or stop glaucoma eye drops. Glaucoma laser procedures or medication implants are options for some patients. Minimally invasive glaucoma surgeries with or without cataract surgery may also reduce the number of eye drops needed.



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