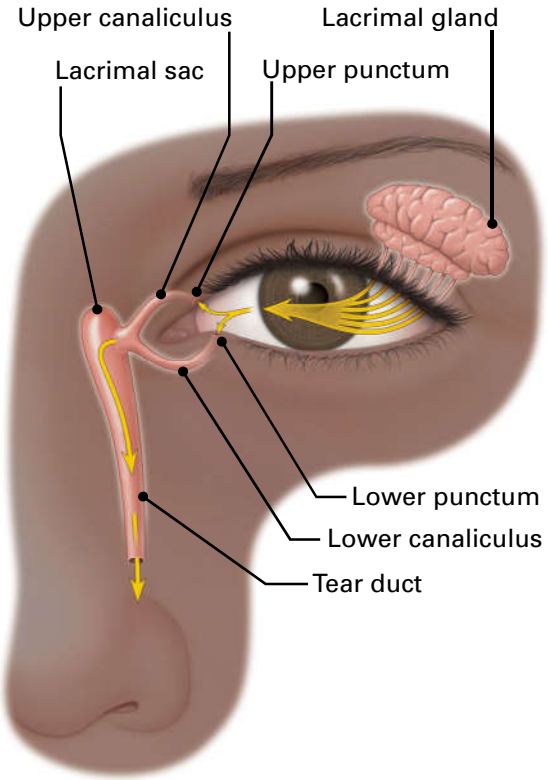
Excessive Tearing

What is excessive tearing?

Our eyes make tears constantly to stay moist, healthy and comfortable. While tearing is normal and necessary, some people can have too many tears. Excessive tearing is when your eyes make too many tears, or when tears don't drain properly.

Tears are produced by the lacrimal gland as well as other glands in your eye. Once in your eye, tears wash toward the nose. There, they leave the eyes and head to the lacrimal sac and tear duct located in the nose. From the lacrimal sac, they drain into the back of your nose and throat. That is why your nose runs when you cry.



What causes excessive tearing?

You may have excessive tearing due to:

- blockage in the tear drainage system from infection, injury, birth defect or age-related changes
- an eyelid or eyelash condition that irritates the eye or does not let it close properly
- wind, cigarette smoke, car fumes, onions or other eye irritants
- a scratch, scrape or cut in the eye
- an eye infection
- glaucoma (an eye disease affecting pressure inside the eye)
- certain medicines
- an allergic reaction to something (such as pets or pollen)
- eye strain. Your eyes tire from looking at something too long, like reading or using a computer.
- dry eyes. Your eyes water in response to the irritation of dry eye.
- certain types of corneal diseases

How is excessive tearing diagnosed?

Your ophthalmologist will begin with an eye exam. He or she will look at your eyelids and the surface of your eye. Your eye doctor may also measure your eye pressure.

Eye drops might be used to help look for dryness on the eye surface. Your eye doctor may also measure your tear production.

You may have your tear ducts flushed with saline (a salt water mixture like tears). This tests whether your tears drain properly through the tear duct.

In some cases, CT (computerized tomography) scanning may be done. This takes detailed pictures of your eye. It can help find causes for excessive tearing.

How is excessive tearing treated?

Your treatment will depend on what is causing your excessive tearing. Here are some options:

- Removing an inturned eyelash or other object in your eye
- Using eye drops or ointment to keep your eye moist
- Surgery to open a blocked tear duct
- Surgery to repair an injured tear duct
- Surgery to add a new opening from the tear duct into your nose
- Surgery to put in an artificial tear duct
- Surgery to enable proper eyelid closure

Summary

Excessive tearing is when your eyes make too many tears, or tears don't drain properly. Treatment can include removing an object that is irritating the eye (such as an inturned eyelash), or using eye drops or ointment to keep the eye moist. In some cases, surgery may be needed to fix an injured or blocked tear duct or to create a new one, or ultimately fix the tear drainage system.

If you have any questions about your eyes or your vision, speak with your ophthalmologist. He or she is committed to protecting your sight.

Get more information about eye health from EyeSmart—provided by the American Academy of Ophthalmology—at **aao.org/eyesmart**.

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