Eye Drops

What are eye drops?

Eye drops are a liquid that you apply to the surface of your eye. They are often used to treat eye pain, discomfort, infection or disease. There are many kinds of eye drops, from salt water drops (saline) to prescription medicines.

Different kinds of eye drops

Over-the-counter eye drops. You can get certain eye drops without a doctor's prescription. These are generally used for relief from dry, red or itchy eyes.

- **Artificial tears** are used to soothe irritated or dry eyes. They are made to be like your natural tears. Artificial tears without preservative chemicals in them (preservative-free) can be used throughout the day as often as needed. Artificial tears with preservatives can be used up to about 6 times a day. Your eye doctor can explain how to use artificial tears effectively for relief.
- **Decongestant eye drops** include nonprescription medicine to help whiten red eyes. They do this by shrinking blood vessels in the white part of your eye. These eye drops are not harmful when used just once in a while. But using them every day can make your red eyes worse when you stop using them.

Even though they do not require a prescription, eye drops are medicine and can cause side effects. Make sure you follow all directions on the package or use them as your doctor tells you to. If you notice any problems, call your doctor right away. You might be having an allergic reaction to the drops.

Prescription eye drops. Your eye doctor can prescribe many kinds of eye drops for various reasons. Here are some types of drops.

- **Corticosteroid eye drops.** These eye drops are used to reduce swelling (inflammation). They can be very helpful, but if used too much can cause other serious eye problems. Follow all of your eye doctor's directions for taking corticosteroid eye drops.
- **Eye drops to treat an infection.** Your ophthalmologist may prescribe certain antibiotic eye drops to help treat an eye infection. They may be antibacterial, antiviral or antifungal drops, depending on the type of infection.
- **Eye drops to treat glaucoma.** Glaucoma is when pressure from fluid in your eye damages your optic nerve. Your optic nerve connects your eye to your brain so you can see. Glaucoma eye drops help lower eye pressure to prevent blindness.
- **Anesthetic eye drops.** These are used in the doctor's office or surgery center to numb your eye so you do not feel pain. They are never meant to be used at home.

Your eye doctor uses special eye drops to widen (dilate) your pupil. The pupil is the round, black circle you see in the center of your eye. The pupil lets light into your eye so you can see. Dilating your pupil allows your eye doctor to look inside your eye.

How to use eye drops

Putting drops in your eyes may seem hard at first. But with practice, it should get much easier. Here are steps to take to properly use eye drops:

- Wash your hands before you remove the cap of the eye drop bottle. Do not touch the tip of the dropper. This helps prevent the spread of germs.
- Tilt your head back slightly. Then pull your lower lid away from the eye to form a "pocket."

- With your other hand, hold the dropper tip over your eyelid pocket. To keep your hand steady, you may want to rest it on your other hand or forehead.

- Look up and let the eye drop fall into the pocket. Do not touch your eye, eyelid or lashes with the bottle tip. Close your eyes (but do not blink). Keep them closed for 1 minute. Your doctor may ask you to press your finger against the inside corner of your eyelid (called punctal occlusion).

©2019 American Academy of Ophthalmology
Content last reviewed 03/19

- Before opening your eyes, wipe away any excess drops or tears with a tissue. Then open your eyes.

- If you take more than one type of eye drop medicine, wait 5 minutes between each medicine. This allows the eye to absorb each type of drop.
- Put the cap back on the bottle and store it in a safe place away from heat. Keep them out of reach of children and pets.

TIP: Avoid a dangerous eye drop mix-up!

Do not store eye drops with other drops bottles. Keep your eye drops separated from ear drops, toe fungus drops or Superglue, for example. People often grab the wrong bottle by mistake, leading to serious eye injuries.

Eye drop side effects

Like any medicine, eye drops can have side effects or cause other health problems. The side effects or problems depend on the type of drop you are using. Some eye drops might make your eyes red or cause blurry vision. Some might make you dizzy, give you a headache or slow your heart rate.

Call your ophthalmologist right away if you notice any side effects when using eye drops. He or she might prescribe another medicine or suggest other ways to treat your eye problem. When you talk with the ophthalmologist, make sure to mention the name of your medicine, how often you take it, and what type of side effects you have.

Even if you are having mild side effects, your ophthalmologist might tell you to keep using the eye drops. For instance, glaucoma eye drops are very important in treating this disease. You may have to tolerate some mild side effects from the glaucoma drops in order to save your vision.

Allergic to eye drops?

Sometimes eye drop medicines are chemical "relatives" of drugs that you may have been allergic to in the past. **Be sure to tell your eye doctor if you have had any reactions to medicine before.**

Allergic reactions to eye drops often include itching, swelling, redness, or a rash around the eyes or eyelids. Contact your ophthalmologist if you notice these problems after starting to use eye drops.

©2019 American Academy of Ophthalmology
Content last reviewed 03/19

Summary

Eye drops are a liquid you apply to the surface of your eye. They are often used to treat eye pain, discomfort, infection or disease. There are many kinds of eye drops, from over-the-counter products to those you need a prescription to buy.

There are specific steps to follow to put eye drops in safely and correctly. Follow your eye doctor's directions for how much of the eye drops to use and how often to use them.

Like any medicine, eye drops can have side effects. Be sure to tell your doctor about any problems or side effects you notice after starting to take eye drops.

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

COMPLIMENTS OF:

BRYAN VEKOVIUS, M.D.

OCULOPLASTIC SURGERY AND
NEURO-OPHTHALMOLOGY

450 ASHLEY RIDGE BLVD.
SHREVEPORT, LA 71106

©2019 American Academy of Ophthalmology
Content last reviewed 03/19