

soothe irritated EYES

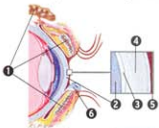
Expert advice on what to do if your eyes are dry and uncomfortable

By Jody Buffalo

Do your eyes often feel irritated or well up? We talked to Andrew I. Caster, M.D., an ophthalmologist in Beverly Hills, Calif., about what causes this and how to remedy it.

THE BASIC FACTS

Tear glands around the eye secrete tears, which create a protective fluid layer that coats the **cornea** (the transparent coating on the eyeball). This film of tears is composed of an inner **mucous layer** (which makes the tear more compatible with the cornea), a middle **water layer**, and an outer **oily layer** that helps slow evaporation. When the moisture balance isn't sustained (due to an insufficient water or oily layer), dry spots occur on the cornea, causing irritation and excess tearing. **Excess tears** are shed as teardrops or escape into the nasal passages.



THE EYE

1. tear glands
2. cornea
3. mucous
4. water layer
5. oily layer
6. excess tears

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

If your eyes feel irritated, it could be from the following:

- **Wind and low humidity levels**

can dry out eyes and cause excess tearing.

- **Soft contact lenses** act like a sponge, absorbing water from the eyes.
- **Reduced tear production** can be related to aging or autoimmune diseases like arthritis.
- **Oral antihistamines** can dry out eyes, as can other drugs; check the label on your medication.

SIMPLE SOLUTIONS

When your eyes feel like sandpaper, Beauty Rx:

1. **Use artificial teardrops to replace moisture and lubricate the eyes.** The thicker the drops, the more relief, but also the more your vision can be blurred. Caster recommends TheraTears (\$11.39) and Systane Lubricant Eye Drops (\$10; both at drugstore.com).
2. **Apply an artificial-tear ointment before going to sleep to keep eyes moisturized.** Try Allergan Refresh P.M. Lubricant Eye Ointment (\$10.49; drugstore.com).
3. **Take flaxseed oil**, an excellent source of essential omega-3 fatty acids. It's been found to provide relief for dry eyes when 2,000 milligrams (in supplement form) are taken per day for three to four weeks.
4. **Try a different type of contact lens.** Acuvue Advance lenses (\$25-\$35 per box of six lenses; acuvue.com for more information) are infused with a moisture-rich wetting agent to keep eyes from drying out.



Artificial tears can provide quick relief for dry eyes.



WHAT WORKS "Being in wind, riding in a car with the windows open or even just sitting near a heating vent can temporarily cause red, irritated, scratchy eyes," says Andrew I. Caster, M.D., an ophthalmologist in Beverly Hills, Calif., and author of *The Eye Laser Miracle: The Complete Guide to Better Vision* (Ballantine Books, 2001). "Dry eyes are a common reason why some people can't wear contacts." Caster, who has performed more than 12,000 laser procedures to correct nearsightedness, farsightedness and astigmatism, says that LASIK is an option for some people whose eyes are irritated by contacts. (The treatment is permanent and costs from \$3,000-\$7,000 for both eyes.) One caveat, says Caster: "About 25 percent of people who undergo LASIK temporarily experience dry eyes for three months after the surgery." An easier – and less expensive – way to remedy dry eyes, says Caster: "I've found that my patients who take flaxseed oil daily have found dramatic relief."