

Eye on Health

Is There A Dry Eye In The House? Treatment Options Provide Relief



(NAPSA)—Marilyn Alexander, a flight attendant, thought that her dry, irritated eyes were the result of the hours she spends working in dry cabin air. It did not seem serious until the condition began to affect several aspects of her life.

“I was using artificial tears many times a day and there didn’t seem to be any improvement,” said Alexander. “In addition to the discomfort I felt at work, I was having trouble using the computer, I was not reading for pleasure as much as I had been and I was having problems driving at night.”

Like nearly four in 10 Americans, Alexander suffers from symptoms of dry eye, one of the most common eye-related complaints, accounting for nearly one-fourth of all ophthalmological office visits.

“Dry eye is more than uncomfortable for patients. Many have to make significant changes to their daily lives to manage their symptoms,” said Marguerite McDonald, M.D., FACS, a clinical professor of ophthalmology at the Tulane University Health Sciences Center, New Orleans and member of the American Academy of Ophthalmology. “Dry eye refers to a group of disorders resulting from reduced tear production, excessive tear evaporation or abnormal tear composition. It may occur only sporadically, after exposure to tobacco smoke, wind or hot, dry air. But it can be a chronic condition and, if left

untreated, could progress, causing permanent vision impairment.”

There are many possible causes. An inflammatory process in the eye tissues is an important underlying cause, which may be brought on by hormonal or neuronal factors. Dry eye is also associated with certain autoimmune disorders such as rheumatoid arthritis, Sjögren’s syndrome or lupus, and the risk for dry eye increases with factors related to the individual (e.g., aging or menopause) and the environment (e.g., exposure to wind). Many people who have had LASIK surgery also report dry eye symptoms.

There is no definitive test for dry eye and certain other conditions mimic its symptoms. Until recently, treatment options were largely limited to temporary symptom relief, such as artificial tears and lifestyle modifications. During the last decade, new treatments have been developed targeting underlying causes of the disease. One example is a prescription eyedrop (cyclosporine ophthalmic emulsion) containing cyclosporine A. It helps the eyes increase natural tear production. Surgical treatments may be used on patients who do not respond adequately to medical approaches.

If you suspect you have dry eye or if you use artificial tears three or more times a day, visit an ophthalmologist (Eye M.D.) for a diagnosis. For more information, visit the American Academy of Ophthalmology at aao.org.