



NO MORE TEARS

Episodes of excess tearing following periods of dryness, discharge, pain, redness, heavy eyelids or blurred vision — if you have been experiencing these symptoms, chances are you may have dry eyes, a condition women are more prone to.


A mixture of water, oils, mucus and proteins originating from special glands around the eye, tears provide moisture and lubrication to optimise vision and keep the eyes comfortable. Having dry eyes suggests that the tear system has gone awry; vision may be affected because tears on the surface of the eye play an important role in focusing light.

"Dry eyes can occur when basal tear production decreases, tear evaporation increases, or tear composition is imbalanced," says ophthalmologist Dr Leo Seo Wei. But why are women more prone to it than men?

One reason is the hormonal changes a woman undergoes. Dr Leo explains, "Hormonal changes during pregnancy and after menopause have been linked with dry eye." Another reason is because "women have an increased risk for autoimmune disorders", such as Sjögren's syndrome, lupus, scleroderma, and rheumatoid arthritis, all of which are "associated with dry eye".

If you experience any of the symptoms listed above, consult an eye specialist to establish the cause. These treatment approaches include:

- **Changing medications** The eye specialist may discuss with the prescribing physician about switching medications — including antihistamines, decongestants, antidepressants, and medications for anxiety, Parkinson's disease and high blood



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pressure — to those that are not associated with dry eyes.

- **Over-the-counter topical medications** These include artificial tears, gels and ointments to treat mild symptoms.
- **Environmental and lifestyle changes** These include decreasing screen time and taking periodic eye breaks. Sunglasses with side shields can be used to reduce symptoms in windy or dry conditions.
- **Smoking cessation/limit exposure to second-hand smoke**
- **Omega-3 fatty acids** Take supplements or add oily fish (salmon, sardine, tuna, trout, anchovy) and flaxseed to your diet.
- **Prescription dry eye medications** Anti-inflammatory medication such as cyclosporine and corticosteroid eye drops may be necessary. In rare cases where all other medications have not produced satisfactory results, serum eye drops may be required. These are special eye drops made using components of the patient's own blood. Something more invasive may sometimes be required.

Dr Leo describes, "Punctal plugs made of silicone or collagen may be partially or completely inserted to cap the tear ducts at the inner corners of the eye to prevent tear drainage. In severe cases, surgical closure of the drainage ducts by thermal punctal cautery may be recommended to close the tear ducts permanently."

Dr Leo Seo Wei

Ophthalmologist

Dr Leo Seo Wei graduated from National University of Singapore in 1996 with the Gold Medal in Ophthalmology. She obtained Fellowship of Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh and Fellowship of Academy of Medicine Singapore in 2004. After passing the United States Medical Licensing Examinations, she completed two intensive clinical fellowships in the United States (Ann Arbor and Los Angeles). Prior to starting private practice, she was Head of Paediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus, National Healthcare Group Eye Institute.

Bestowed with numerous service excellence and research awards, she has published several peer-reviewed articles, and presented and performed live surgeries at international conferences in Asia-Pacific, Europe and USA. She was a committee member of the American Academy of Ophthalmology (2016–17). She is also a reviewer for many journals, including *Survey of Ophthalmology* and *British Journal of Ophthalmology*.

She is currently in the Scientific Bureau of the World Society of Paediatric Ophthalmology & Strabismus, and is the external scientific member of the Centralised Institutional Research Board, SingHealth.

Her areas of interest include cataract surgery, strabismus surgery (adult and paediatric), and paediatric ophthalmology.

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