

Meibomian Cysts in children

What is a Meibomian Cyst?

Eyelid cysts are a common problem in young children. They are swollen oil glands. There are around 20 of these oil glands in the body of each of the eyelids. They secrete oil into the tear film to stabilise the tears. These glands are long and thin and their mouths open at the base of the eyelashes. When the lid margins become red and inflamed, the tiny mouths swell up and close. The gland expands and the lid swells. It can become infected and appear as a tense red swelling.

The active immune system in a child reacts to wall off the cyst. As the infection settles, the cyst wall can take some time to disappear.

The cyst can rupture through skin and appear as a granuloma.

It can also rupture on the inside of the eyelid. It then appears as a pink, protruding fleshy area under the lid.



Cysts are not a serious health issue, but are very unsightly.

They are easier to influence in the very acute stage. If you see any lid redness or swelling, you can start intensive hot bathing with a hot face cloth that day.

You should also use chloramphenicol eye ointment to the lid and into the eye at least 4 times daily for up to one week.

They all heal eventually, although this may take many months.

Surgery is only rarely indicated when the cyst ruptures and rubs the sensitive surface of the eye. Any surgical procedure involves a general anaesthetic in this age group.

The lid inflammation is a skin problem which predisposes to cyst formation. It will flare up and down intermittently. It is important to carry out simple measures to control this condition.

Daily eyelid cleaning routine.

This is done with a clean face cloth and wash hand basin full of hand hot water (temperature suitable for skin contact).

- Wring out the face cloth and fold to make a hot towel.
- Show your child how to close their eyes and apply a hot face cloth to their closed lids.
- The aim is to heat the oil glands in the eyelids and allow them to open.
- The face cloth can be reheated again as soon as it begins to cool.
- Ideally this should be done every day for up to 5 minutes at a time.
- Finally, wipe the face cloth gently along the base of the eyelashes to help dislodge any debris.



Lid cleaning can be incorporated as a game into bath time routine for very young children.



Diet

The use of omega-3 is debatable; however, some children find their



symptoms improve when it is added to the diet. It is now available to buy as chewable fruit flavoured capsules for smaller children. A tablespoon of milled flaxseeds can also be added to foods such as breakfast cereals or casseroles as an omega-3 source.

What to look for

- Increased redness/soreness of eye itself
- Constant blurred vision
- Swelling spreading to involve the whole eyelid



ACTION: If your child develops any of the above, please attend your GP or optometrist for further advice.

