

Inflammatory Lid Problems in Children

Advice for Parents

Meibomian cysts, acute and chronic



Eyelid cysts are a common problem in small 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 and keep the eye bathed. They are very 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 yellow based granuloma. It can also rupture into the other side 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 and rarely cause any lid scarring.

There is rarely any indication for surgery. Surgery is only indicated when the cyst ruptures and rubs the sensitive surface of the eye. Any surgical procedure would involve a general anaesthetic in this age group.

The lid inflammation is a skin problem. It will flare up and down as your child grows. It is important to carry out simple measures to control this condition, as part of your child's routine.

Daily hot bathing and lid cleaning will help. This is done with a clean facecloth and wash hand basin full of hand hot water (temperature suitable for skin contact). Wring out face cloth and fold to make hot towel. Show your child how to close eyes and apply hot cloth to closed eye lids. The aim is to heat the oil glands in the eyelids and allow them to open. The cloth can be reheated again as soon as it begins to cool. Ideally this should be done every day for up to 2 minutes at a time. Finally, wipe the cloth gently along the base of the lashes to help dislodge any debris.

Lid cleaning can be incorporated as a game into bath time routine in very small children.

A daily omega 3 oil supplement can be useful. It is now available to buy as chewable fruit flavoured capsules for smaller children. Milled linseeds can also be added to breakfast cereals as an omega 3 source.