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## Blepharitis

Blepharitis is a disease of the eyelids, in particular at the edge of the eyelids where the lashes are present. It is common and frequently occurs in people who have a tendency towards oily skin, dandruff, or conversely, dry eyes. The classic finding in blepharitis is that the lashes are coated with scales. The scales can increase to the point that they form crusts that cause the lids to stick together in the mornings. Secondary swelling and redness of the lids are not unusual. The usual cause of this disease is the normal Staphylococci bacteria found on the lid skin. The bacteria increase in number and the crusts consist of dead bacteria, live bacteria, and exotoxins. These crusts fall into the eye causing marked irritation and secondary redness of the lids, or even allergic reactions in the eye. Over a long duration blepharitis can cause scarring of the eyelids and loss of the eyelashes. Severe scarring of the cornea can also occur.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to make one's skin free of bacteria, so there is no permanent cure for blepharitis. The standard treatments to control blepharitis are to remove the crusts with cleaning, disinfectants, or antibiotics. Cleaning the eyelids should be done on a regular basis. I recommend that you use a high powered (10 to 12x) magnifying mirror (such as for make-up application) to allow one to see the crusts on the lashes. Place a drop or two of baby shampoo on a wet washcloth to provide some abrasion and then scrub the edge of the eyelids horizontally with the eyes closed for a few minutes. Next rinse the shampoo away, so it does not irritate the eye. This should be done twice a day, typically in the morning and evening. After scrubbing, one should reexamine the eyelids to make sure the crusts are removed. If they are not, the scrubbing is not being done properly. Treatment is usually continued for two weeks on a twice a day basis. If the crusts return in the future you can scrub on your own to control the problem. In patients that have dandruff, we do recommend the use of a selenium containing shampoo such as Selsun Blue. This is especially important if one tends to get dandruff in their eyebrows.

Some infections can be quite resistant and will not improve with lid scrubs alone. For those cases your Doctor may recommend disinfectants or antibiotics as treatment. We currently use SteriLid Eyelid Cleanser as a non-prescription disinfectant. It is used twice per day similar to the lid scrubs. Occasionally steroid medication will also be used in a particularly resistant form of the blepharitis.