

How to Get Rid of a Stye in Your Eye

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Your eyelids protect your eye from injury, regulate how much light is admitted to your retina and maintain a film of tears by distributing tears over your eye
- › A stye is formed after dirt, dust or skin cells block your Meibomian gland duct and bacterial growth forms a lump, similar to a pimple or a boil, at the edge of your eyelid; this should be differentiated from a chalazion or cellulitis
- › Home treatments for a stye include warm compresses, coriander seed tea wash, tea bag compresses and washing your eyelids with mild soap to eliminate the dirt and dead skin cells that plug your oil gland duct

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Your eyelids protect your eye from injury, help regulate how much light is admitted to your retina and maintain a film of tears by distributing tears over your eye and pumping tears from the conjunctival and lacrimal sacs. You have Meibomian glands at the base of your eyelids, near your eyelashes.

These glands secrete an oil that combines with your watery tears to lubricate and protect your eye from drying.¹ Without enough quality tears to lubricate and nourish the eye, the orb can become irritated and you may develop an inflammation of the cornea, leading to blurry vision, redness and a burning and scratchy sensation, if left untreated.²

A stye may develop on your eyelid in the Meibomian gland duct. These irritations present as red lumps along the edge of the eyelid. While they can be annoying or painful,

they are rarely serious. Styes can often be successfully treated at home, but before determining your course of treatment, you'll want to make sure you're not dealing with chalazion or cellulitis, which may require other or additional medical treatment.

What Is a Stye?

A stye is also known as a hordeolum. It is an infection, often involving the bacteria *Staphylococcus*³ that grows along the edge of your eyelid. The infection creates a small painful bump that may take on the appearance of a small pimple or boil. It's common for it to be filled with pus. More often than not, styes appear one at a time, as they are not contagious and don't spread along the lid in the way other infections may.

However, it is possible to have more than one stye at a time. A stye is formed when dead skin, dirt or oil builds up in the oil glands along the edge of your eyelids and bacteria begins to grow inside, causing the stye to develop.⁴ A stye may also occur under the eyelid, as there are oil gland openings there as well. When this happens, it is called an internal hordeolum.⁵ These styes are treated in the same way as those you find along the edge of your eyelid.

How to Identify a Stye

As a stye grows, your eyelid may become swollen, red and inflamed. The growth period often lasts three days before the stye naturally breaks open and begins to drain.⁶ Your eyelid may become painful and it may feel like there is something in your eye that doesn't come out.

A stye may be itchy, but refrain from scratching it. The area may also have crust along the edges of the stye and your eye may water.⁷ The infected gland triggers these symptoms but, while irritating, they do not threaten your eyesight and are not serious. It is important to differentiate between a stye and another infection of your eyelid that is far more serious and may threaten your eyesight, such as cellulitis.

Cellulitis is also an infection and may occur on the eyelid tissue, but it is an infection that affects a larger area and doesn't appear similar to a pimple or boil. This infection is often triggered by a trauma to the eyelid, such as an insect bite, or from a sinus infection.⁸ Although both a stye and cellulitis may cause redness and swelling of the eyelid, cellulitis often causes a greater amount of swelling, including the tissue around your eye.

Complications from cellulitis may include spread of the infection to the eye socket and the eyeball, causing eye pain, vision problems and even blindness. Confusing a stye with cellulitis may lead to serious permanent problems. Take care to fully evaluate your eye swelling and infection before deciding to treat your eye at home.

How to Treat Your Stye at Home

A stye infection typically responds relatively quickly to the treatments you use at home. If you notice the infection getting worse, spreading or becoming more painful, seek medical care for evaluation and treatment. These strategies help reduce the swelling from the stye and help it to mature and heal more quickly.^{9,10}

Wash hands frequently — Keep your hands away from your eyes and your face as much as possible. Your hands carry small particles of dust, dirt and grime that may easily clog your oil glands, triggering a stye, or may irritate a stye you already have. Washing your hands frequently helps to reduce the irritation to your eyelid and speed healing.

Warm compress — The most effective means of treating a stye and reducing your discomfort is a warm wet compress over the eyelid. You may make one of these with a wash cloth and warm water from the sink. Never warm the washcloth in the microwave with the intent of placing it over the delicate skin of your eye as it may burn your skin. Test your warm compress against the skin of your wrist to ensure it's not too hot.

Keep the compress over your eye for 15 minutes, three to four times each day. When the wet compress becomes cold, run it under warm water again. If it doesn't cause too much discomfort, you may massage the area while the compress is in place.

Keep your eyelids clean – Styes may be triggered when the glands on your eyelids become clogged, so keeping them clean helps to prevent a new stye and will help to heal the one you already have. Use a mild, chemical-free soap to gently wash your face and eye area.

Refrain from using makeup or contact lenses – The stye is filled with bacteria, so you may infect your makeup and contact lenses with the bacteria and reinfect yourself later. This includes any makeup that is applied near your eye, such as mascara, eye shadow or concealer.

Contact lenses not only may carry the bacteria but may also increase the risk of damage to your eye or your contact lens from the stye. Be sure to throw away any items used near your eye right before the stye developed to avoid reinfection.

Let the stye open naturally – Squeezing the stye can release pus filled with bacteria, and thus spread the infection to other oil glands or to your other eye.

Coriander seed wash – Coriander has antibacterial qualities that may help your stye to heal. Brew a coriander tea from the seeds and then use the fluid to clean your eyes after the fluid has cooled.

Warm tea bags – Typically black or green tea bags work well for warm compresses over your eye. Naturally antibacterial and anti-inflammatory, tea will help reduce the irritating inflammation around your eye and help heal the infection in the stye. Steep a cup of tea and let the bag cool so it doesn't burn your skin when you apply it. Keep it over your closed eye for 10 minutes and discard the tea bag after one use.

Discomfort relief – Cool moisture helps to bring relief from the discomfort of the stye and reduce the inflammation. Cold cucumber slices are a simple and effective

method of reducing the irritation from a stye. Slice a cucumber from the refrigerator and place a slice on your eye for 10 minutes.

Avoid painkillers — A stye is uncomfortable and irritating, but **over-the-counter painkillers** do nothing to reduce the inflammation or treat the infection. A better option is to frequently use warm compresses and intersperse them with cool moisture to help alleviate the discomfort.

When to Call the Doctor

An infection on your eyelid has the potential for reaching your eye socket or your eye, increasing your risk of vision loss. These are some of the symptoms that may indicate it's time to seek medical attention:^{11,12}

The stye gets worse quickly

The stye bleeds

Your vision is affected

The stye spreads to your eyeball

The skin around your eye or cheeks becomes red and swollen

Your eye, not just the eyelid, hurts

You can't open your eye from the swelling

You get recurring styes

Your eyelid turns red

Your stye gets very large

What May Trigger a Stye?

Once you've had a stye or eye infection, it's important to replace your eye makeup, including your mascara and eye shadow, to prevent recurrence of an infection. Eye makeup should also be replaced every six months as it may become a breeding ground for bacterial growth, increasing your risk of infection. Wearing too much eye makeup,

eye liner or sharing eye makeup with other women may increase your risk of developing a sty.

Wearing makeup overnight increases the risk of plugging your glands with mascara or eye liner and developing an environment for bacterial growth.¹³ Men and women who are under a significant amount of stress may also find they experience an increased risk of developing a sty.¹⁴ If you touch your eyes frequently, or insert your contact lenses without disinfecting them, you may increase your risk of depositing dust or dirt near the Meibomian gland duct.¹⁵

A sty may be triggered when the oil glands are blocked by dirt, grime and dust, so keeping your eyelashes clean helps to prevent styes from developing. A lack of essential fatty acids in your diet may result in flaky skin, which may also block your oil glands. Essential fatty acids are not produced by your body and must be consumed in your diet.

Essential fatty acids help the formation of healthy cell membranes, thyroid and adrenal activity, and support healthy skin and hair and hormone production.¹⁶ Linoleic acid is an omega-6 fatty acid and a-linolenic acid is an omega-3 fatty acid, both of which are needed in your diet since you cannot synthesize them in your body.

A lack of these fatty acids increases the risk of your skin becoming flaky, and thus increases the risk dead skin may plug your Meibomian glands and develop into a sty.

You might be at higher risk of developing a sty if you suffer from blepharitis, or inflammation of the eyelids when the oil glands are blocked. This may occur more frequently when you suffer from environmental allergies, such as allergies to pollen.¹⁷ The condition triggers the formation of dandruff-type scales along the eyelid and eyelashes. In many cases, a regular cleaning routine to your eyelashes will help control the condition.

Stye or Chalazion?

A sty is very similar to a chalazion. In the case of a sty, the inflammation and swelling is the result of a bacterial infection. A chalazion is triggered from some of the same risk

factors discussed above, but the swelling does not include a bacterial infection. A sty often resolves within a week with simple home treatments, while a chalazion will present with swelling and redness but not discomfort or pain.

A chalazion is often larger than a sty and will be located under the upper lid and not along the eyelid. The formation of a chalazion occurs when your oil glands are blocked and the oil forms a swelling. The lump is painless, often on the upper lid, and less frequently on the lower lid.¹⁸ The fluid in the oil gland thickens and is unable to be excreted. You may experience tearing, mild irritation and blurred vision if the lump is large enough to press against the eyeball.

A chalazion is more common in adults than children, while styes are more commonly found in children. Although many chalazions will disappear without treatment, they often recur if you don't address the trigger that caused the chalazion in the first place. These triggers are the same as those for styes and also include acne rosacea, seborrhea, viral infections and tuberculosis.¹⁹

Sources and References

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