

Watery or sticky eyes

Lots of babies get watery or sticky eyes. This often happens because their tear ducts (the tubes that carry tears away from the eyes) can be slow to fully develop and open. About 1 in 5 babies are born with tear ducts that have not fully developed, affecting one or both eyes.



The condition is not usually serious. You may have to wipe away some glue-like material, but your baby's eyeball should stay healthy and white and your baby should not be particularly bothered by the condition. The problem should clear up on its own, but watery eyes may return if your baby gets a cold as the newly opened tear duct may become blocked easily. In rare cases, a watering eye in a baby is due to other eye problems.

If the tear duct is still blocked at 12 months, you should speak to your GP who may refer your baby to an eye specialist. The specialist may perform a procedure where a very thin instrument is inserted into the tear duct to open it up. Speak to your GP sooner if the condition is particularly bad, causes your baby distress, or if you think there might be something wrong with your baby's eye or eyelids.

Treatment

The problem will usually go away as soon as your baby's tear ducts finish developing. This normally happens within a few weeks, but it can take several months for some babies. If gluey material develops then wipe it away with some damp cotton wool, moistened with sterile water (cool water that has been boiled). It may help if you massage the tear duct every few hours, using gentle pressure on the outside of the nose. This may help to clear any blockage and can help the tear duct to develop.



Things to watch out for

You may see some slight redness of the eyeball due to mild inflammation, this will not normally need to be treated and should clear up on its own. Sometimes sticky eyes may develop into conjunctivitis (infection of the eye). The eye may look inflamed and red and your baby may rub their eyes. Conjunctivitis is not usually serious, but it is very infectious and needs to be treated by your GP. Antibiotic eye drops are sometimes prescribed to help clear conjunctivitis. Wash your hands before and after applying the eye drops and make sure that you use a different towel for your baby to avoid spreading the infection.



For more information, help and support go to www.choosewellmanchester.org.uk or visit NHS Choices at www.nhs.uk

Choose the right care

What to do next...



Choose care at home if...

- Your baby has sticky or watery eyes
- Their eyeball is healthy and white
- They are not particularly bothered by their sticky or watery eyes



Choose your Pharmacist, or GP if...

- Their eye becomes inflamed, angry or red
- There is yellow or green sticky or crusty discharge around the eye that keeps coming back
- Your baby rubs the eye a lot or seems in pain
- Your baby does not like to open their eye, or light seems to hurt the baby's eye
- You think your baby might have conjunctivitis
- The structure of an eye or eyelids does not seem right



Call 999 A&E if...

- There are no reasons why you should need to go to A&E for problems with watery or sticky eyes
- A&E is for urgent, life-threatening illness and injury



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