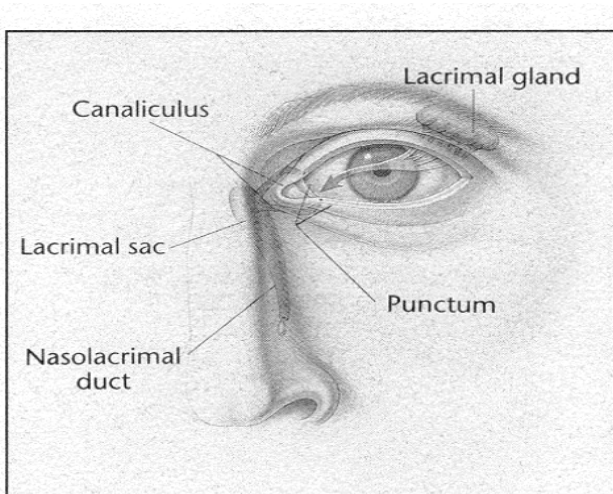


# Tearing in Adults

In some people, tears well up in the eye because too many tears are produced or because the tears are not draining properly. Excess tears give the eye a moist appearance, and can collect along the border of the lower lid and overflow onto the cheek.

Small glands, located in the surface tissue on the white of the eye and lining the eyelids, constantly produce small quantities of tears to keep the eye healthy and lubricated. The *lacrimal gland*, a larger gland located in the upper eyelid, responds to emotion or eye irritation by producing larger quantities of tears (see “What causes excess tearing?”).



Tears flow across the eye from the lacrimal gland to the punctum, through the canaliculus, and the nasolacrimal duct into the nose.

## How do tears drain?

After bathing the eye's surface, tears enter a small opening in each lid (the punctum), and drain through a small canal (canaliculus) into the lacrimal sac and down the nasolacrimal duct into the nose (see diagram). This explains why we have a runny nose when we cry, since excess tears reach the nose through the normal tear drainage system.

Improper tear drainage and overflow tearing can be caused by:

- Malpositioned eyelid or punctum;
- Faulty blinking;
- Orbital injury (fractures, cuts);
- Birth defects
- Infections (especially of the lacrimal sac)
- Complications of burns or radiation therapy.

Excess tear production can be caused by:

- Superficial foreign bodies;
- Wind, smoke, fumes;
- Infections, allergic reactions;
- Glaucoma
- Eyestrain;
- Emotion;
- “Dry” eyes.

## What causes excess tearing?

Surprisingly, people with dry eyes often complain of tearing. Even though

the underlying problem is too few lubricating tears to keep the eye moist, the large lacrimal gland often reacts by producing an excessive amount of tears. Instead of draining normally, the excess tears will run down the cheek.

### **How is the cause of excessive tearing determined?**

A thorough examination by an ophthalmologist (Eye M.D.) is necessary to determine which of these problems is causing excessive tearing. He or she may attempt to irrigate fluid through the tear drainage system and into the nose. Other tests such as measuring tear production or recovering tears from the nose may also be performed.

### **How is excessive tearing treated?**

Treatment depends on the exact cause. If excess tears are caused by an in-turned eyelash, the offending eyelash is removed. Abnormalities of the eyelid or eyelid position may require surgery. If the tear drainage system is blocked, surgery to open or bypass the blockage may be necessary.

The type of surgery depends on the location of the blockage. For example, it may be necessary to make an additional opening from the lacrimal sac into the

nose, a procedure known as a dacryocystorhinostomy or DCR. If the problem is dry eyes, artificial tear supplements or even closure of the tear drainage puncta may be helpful.

Occasionally, the exact cause cannot be determined. In such cases, the patient may have to learn to live with the problem.

### **Why are regular medical eye examinations important for everyone?**

Eye disease can occur at any age. Many eye diseases do not cause symptoms until the disease has done damage. Since most blindness is preventable if diagnosed and treated early, regular medical examinations by an ophthalmologist are very important.

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