Stye

A stye is an infection on the outside edge of the eyelid, in a gland at the base of an eye lash. They last a few short days before getting better on their own, like a skin boil does. However, it is better to use antibiotic eyedrops or ointment such as chloramphenicol very frequently into the eye for the day or two it takes for the stye to start to settle.

Chalazion (meibomian cyst)

A chalazion is a lump in the eyelid due to a blocked oil gland. Whilst there may be times they can look like a stye, they are not usually infected and take much longer to go away. As a rule they do not need, and do not get better with, antibiotic eye drops or medicines. If they become acutely red, swollen and sore, then the flare up can be treated in a similar way to a stye, with chloramphenicol to the eye. After a few short days the soreness will settle, but a painless lump will remain.

Chalazia get better on their own. It is not possible to know how long this will take. About 10% get better each month that goes by. The lump tends to vary in size. More than one may develop.

In a few cases where the age of the child allows surgery without them being put to sleep with general anaesthesia, it is appropriate to do a minor operation to remove the meibomian cyst. However, this is rarely possible before 12 years of age, and most teenagers prefer to let the chalazion get better on its own. Those wishing an operation have it done under local anaesthetic by an injection into the eyelid to numb the area.

Blepharitis

The eyelids’ oil glands can become inflamed, and this can lead to months of crusty sore red eyes especially in the mornings. In some cases the cornea (window) of the eye can become scarred, which damages the sight. Fortunately, blepharitis is very treatable.

Treatments

Dietary supplement

Mild blepharitis and most chalazia do not need treatment. However, there is evidence adding extra essential oils to the diet can help, and we suggest obtaining Flaxseed oil from your local health food store, and giving this to your child long-term, until the problem has gone away permanently. Flaxseed may also help when the condition is worse, and in that situation we will request you to use some of the following as well:

Antibiotic drops or ointment

Chloramphenicol eye drops or ointment are useful when the chalazion or blepharitis has an acute flare-up due to infection. They do not treat the underlying problem itself, and do not help in the long term treatment of the condition.

Oral erythromycin/doxycycline

Where several chalazia develop or where chronic blepharitis is causing a lot of discomfort or affecting the sight, then we can offer a course of tablets or syrup for a minimum of 4 months. This is similar to what is used in the treatment of Acne. Erythromycin or azithromycin is used in younger children and doxycycline is the best medicine for teenagers and adults.

Steroid eye drops

Other treatments, such as steroid eyedrops are sometime needed at the beginning, but can usually be stopped soon if safer treatments such as the erythromycin or doxycycline are used consistently.
Other treatments
Hot spoon bathing, eyelid cleaning and similar steps are often advised, but there is no evidence to show they work and they can be hard to do long-term in a reluctant child.

Lid cleaning
Hot spoon bathing.

What happens if the treatment does not work?
Chalazia will settle on their own, but it is difficult to predict how long this will take. Chronic blepharitis will get better with the appropriate treatment, but it may take weeks for the benefit to be obvious. The main reason treatments such as erythromycin or doxycycline do not work is because they are not being taken regularly. Children and teenagers are not very good at remembering or taking their treatments and so it is important that you see them using the medicine every day.

What is going to happen to my child with time?
Chalazia go away on their own eventually, and most children do not develop more problems. Some children go through a phase where they develop repeated problems with the oil glands of the eye. They may develop more than one chalazion and/or chronic blepharitis. If they are otherwise in good health then it is usual for them to grow out of these problems with time.

BLEPHARITIS and EYELID LUMPS
What is chronic blepharitis?
What are styes, meibomian cysts & chalazia?
How are they treated?

Further Information
We hope this leaflet will help you to understand the treatment offered to your child. If you feel you need more information or have any concerns please contact the Eye Department on 0121 333 9462. Further information and internet access is available in the Child and Family Information Centre. This is on the Ground Floor of the hospital near the main Reception Desk.

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