

Patient education: Sty (hordeolum) (The Basics)

Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate

What is a sty? — A sty is a red and painful lump on the eyelid. It happens when a small gland on the edge of the eyelid gets infected or inflamed. Styes can occur on the upper or lower eyelids. Most styes get better on their own after a few days to a week. Another word for sty is “hordeolum.”

People sometimes get a sty confused with a different eye problem called a “chalazion.” A chalazion also causes a lump on the eyelid. But a sty is caused by an infection and is painful. A chalazion is not tender or painful, but it often lasts longer than a sty does.

What are the symptoms of a sty? — People who have a sty have a red and painful lump on the edge of their eyelid ([picture 1](#)). A sty usually develops over a few days. It can look like a pimple. Styes can cause other symptoms, too, such as tearing and eyelid pain and swelling.

Is there a test for a sty? — No. But your doctor or nurse should be able to tell if you have a sty by doing an exam and talking with you.

Is there anything I can do on my own to feel better? — Yes. To ease your symptoms and help your sty get better, you can put warm, wet pressure on the sty. Wet a clean wash cloth with warm water and put it over your sty. When the wash cloth cools, reheat it with warm water and put it back over the sty. Repeat these steps for 5 to 15 minutes, and try to do this 3 to 4 times a day.

You should NOT squeeze or pop your sty. Also, you should not wear eye makeup or contact lenses until your sty is all better.

Should I see a doctor or nurse? — See your doctor or nurse if:

- Your sty doesn’t go away after you treat it on your own for 1 week
- Your sty gets very big, bleeds, or affects your vision
- Your whole eye is red, or your whole eyelid is red and swollen
- The redness or swelling spreads to your cheek or other parts of your face

What treatments might my doctor use? — If your sty doesn’t get better or if it leads to other problems, your doctor might:

- Prescribe a cream or ointment that goes in the eye and on the eyelid
- Prescribe antibiotic medicines
- Drain the sty

Can styes be prevented? — Yes. To lower your chances of getting a sty, you can:

- Wash your hands before you touch your eyes

- Wash your hands before you put in contact lenses and keep your contact lenses clean (if you wear contact lenses)
- Take off your eye makeup each night
- Not share eye makeup with other people

More on this topic

[Patient education: Conjunctivitis \(pinkeye\) \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Chalazion \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Conjunctivitis \(pinkeye\) \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

All topics are updated as new evidence becomes available and our [peer review process](#) is complete.

This topic retrieved from UpToDate on: Jan 12, 2017.

The content on the UpToDate website is not intended nor recommended as a substitute for medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your own physician or other qualified health care professional regarding any medical questions or conditions. The use of UpToDate content is governed by the [UpToDate Terms of Use](#). ©2017 UpToDate, Inc. All rights reserved.

Topic 16336 Version 7.0