

Tear-Duct Blockage

What Is a Tear-Duct Blockage?

A tear duct is a small tube that drains tears from the eyes. Tears are made in glands under the eyelids. They wash over the eyes to keep them moist and clean. Then, they drain through the tear ducts. When a tear duct is blocked (a blockage), the tears can't drain.

Many babies are born with a tear-duct blockage. Blocked tear ducts in babies usually clear up with little or no treatment by the time a child is 1 year old.

What Are the Signs & Symptoms of a Tear-Duct Blockage?

A child with a blocked tear duct may have:

- more tearing than usual (even when the child isn't crying)
- dried crusting on the eyelashes
- mild redness or irritation of the eyes or eyelids (from the child rubbing them)

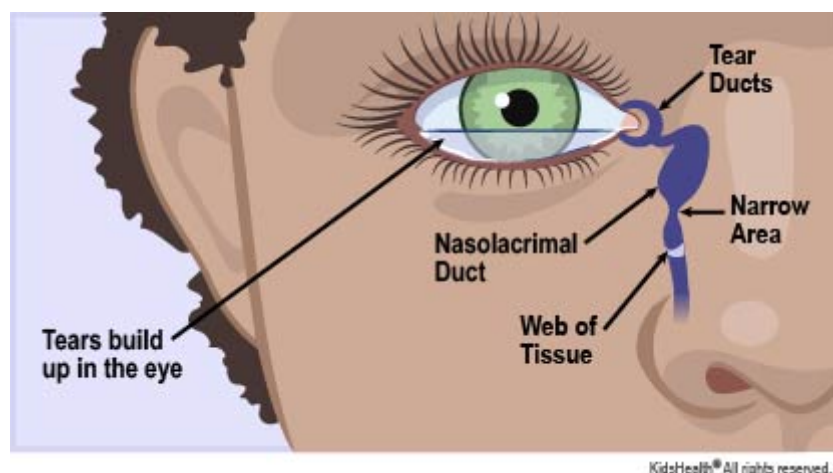
Babies with blocked tear ducts usually show symptoms between birth and 12 weeks of age. But sometimes the problem doesn't show up until the tear duct gets infected. An infection can happen when germs grow inside the blocked duct. Signs of an infected tear duct include:

- yellow or green mucus draining from the eye
- eye redness
- a swollen eyelid

What Causes a Tear-Duct Blockage?

Babies often get blocked tear ducts when the tear-duct system is not fully developed. A baby may have:

- a tear duct that is too narrow
- a web of tissue that blocks the duct



Older kids get blocked tear ducts less often. When they do, the cause may be:

- a polyp (extra tissue) in the nose
- a cyst or tumor in the nose
- an eye injury

How Is a Tear-Duct Blockage Diagnosed?

The doctor will do an exam and ask about symptoms. Sometimes they do a painless test using a dye to see if the tear duct is draining well.

How Is a Tear-Duct Blockage Treated?

Often a blocked tear duct clears up on its own, especially in babies under 6 months old.

If your child has a blocked tear duct, your doctor may show you how to massage the eye several times a day at home for a few months. Massaging can help open the blockage.

Your child's doctor may recommend you see an ophthalmologist (eye doctor) if a tear duct doesn't open up on its own or if your child keeps getting infections. The ophthalmologist will do an eye exam to rule out other problems and, if needed, can clear the blockage.

An ophthalmologist can do different types of surgery to open a blockage, such as:

- probing the blocked duct using a thin metal instrument
- placing special tiny tubes to stretch the tear duct
- using a catheter that expands like a balloon to open the tear duct

After surgery, the doctor will prescribe an antibiotic ointment or drops to use while the tear duct heals.

How Can Parents Help?

If your child's eye is tearing more than usual, or you think it could be infected, call your child's doctor.

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Note: All information is for educational purposes only. For specific medical advice, diagnoses, and treatment, consult your doctor.

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