

Stye

A stye is a common painful eyelid problem, where a small abscess forms at the base of an eyelash. It looks like a small yellow pus-filled spot. Vision is unaffected. Most styes get better on their own and do not need any treatment. Hot compresses can ease the pain and encourage the stye to burst.

What is a stye?

The medical name for a stye is **hordeolum** (more than one hordeolum is hordeola). Styes are a very common type of infection of the eyelid. There are two types of stye:

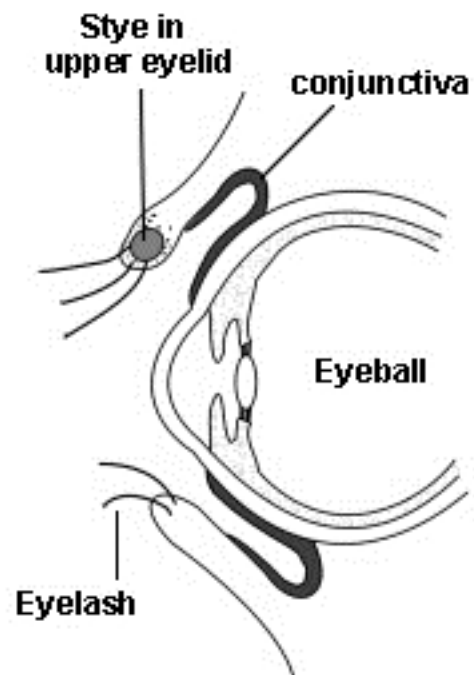
- **External stye (external hordeolum)**. This is the common stye. It appears along the edge of the eyelid due to infection in the root (follicle) of an eyelash. It may start off as a small red lump but, as it develops into a little abscess (collection of pus), it looks like a yellow pus-filled spot.
- **Internal stye (internal hordeolum)**. These are also called meibomian styes. They happen when a type of gland in the eyelid (meibomian gland) becomes infected. This type of stye is found on the inner surface of the eyelid, against the eyeball.

Styes usually develop quite quickly, over a few days. Usually only one eye is affected, though you may get more than one stye at a time, on the same lid. Styes are painful but they usually get better on their own within a week or two.

What causes styes?

A stye usually occurs for no apparent reason. The usual bacterium (germ) that causes the infection is called *Staphylococcus aureus*. This is a common bacterium that is often found on healthy skin. It usually does no harm, but sometimes it invades the skin to cause infections such as boils, abscesses, and styes.

Some people have an eyelid condition called blepharitis. This is an inflammation of the eyelids that can make you more prone to developing styes. See separate leaflet called '*Blepharitis*' for more information.



What is the treatment for a stye?

- **No treatment** is often necessary. Once a 'head' formed on the stye, most burst within 3-4 days, and the tiny amount of pus drains away leaving no further problem.
- **Hot compresses** may help to ease soreness and draw the pus to a head. Hold a clean flannel, that has been in hot water, gently but firmly against the closed eye. Do this for 5-10 minutes, 3-4 times a day. (The water should be hot, but comfortable and not scalding.)
- **Epilation of the eyelash** means that the eyelash is plucked out. This is uncomfortable but can help the infection from the hair follicle to drain. This only works for an external stye.
- **Incision and drainage** can be performed by a professional. This is like lancing a boil. A sterile needle (or perhaps a scalpel) can be used to open the stye and drain the pus. This should not be attempted by yourself as you might spread the infection to the eyelid, with serious consequences.

Antibiotic ointments and antibiotic medicines are not recommended for the treatment of styes.

To reduce the chance of the infection spreading:

- Don't share face cloths/flannels or towels with anyone whilst you have a sty.
- Always wash your hands after touching the affected eyelid.

Are there any complications?

Most styes are very minor infections that clear without any treatment and cause no problems. Styes do not affect your vision.

Very occasionally the infection can spread to the eye causing conjunctivitis, which may need antibiotic ointment to clear.

An extremely rare complication is the infection spreading to involve the whole eyelid and tissues surrounding the eye. The eyelid may be very swollen and red, you might not be able to open the eye and you may have a lot of pain and fever. Sometimes the eyeball is pushed forward so that your eye sticks out more, and you may be very sensitive to the light. If you develop this type of complication, called orbital cellulitis, you need to see a medical professional urgently. Treatment of orbital cellulitis is with antibiotics, usually intravenously via a drip, in hospital.

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