

Stye (also known as Hordeolum)

What is a stye?

A stye is the common name for a hordeolum. A stye is an infection (abcess) of one of the small oil producing glands lining the eyelid, usually caused by the bacteria that are normally found along the eyelids. A stye can occur on either the upper or lower eyelid. There are two types of styes, internal and external hordeola.

An internal hordeolum (stye) is a bacterial infection of the meibomian glands inside the eyelids. Internal styes tend to be more severe and occur a little less often than an external hordeolum.

An external hordeolum (stye) is a bacterial infection of the Glands of Zeis and/or Glands of Moll inside the eyelids. This type of stye is more superficial and tends to heal more readily.

What causes a stye?

A stye is usually caused by the bacteria staphylococcus aureus, which infects the sebaceous (oil) glands within the eyelids. Styes are quite common in infants and children but affect people of all ages.

If the pores of the oil glands become blocked, they are prone to developing an infection. The bacteria multiply in the clogged gland creating an abcess.

A stye may be related to blepharitis, which should be treated regularly to avoid styes. If you have blepharitis associated with a stye your eye doctor will instruct you on how to manage it and prevent future styes.

Possible Signs and Symptoms of a Stye

- A well defined lump or bump on either upper or lower eyelid
- Localized swelling of the eyelid
- Mild pain in the eyelid
- Sensitive to touch
- Redness of the affected eyelid
- Crusting of the eyelid margins
- Burning in the eye
- Eyelid may appear full or droopy
- Mucous or watery discharge in the eye
- Irritation of the eye

- Light sensitivity
- Sensation of a foreign object in the eye

Internal Hordeolum (Stye) tends to come to a point on the underside of the eyelid and has an appearance of general redness on the outside of the eyelid.

An external hordeolum (Stye) comes to a visible point on the outside of the eyelid and may appear white or yellow in the center of the swelling. It may even drain some of this whitish material (pus).

Treatment of a Stye

Most styes can be treated by applying hot compresses for 10-15 minutes at a time four times a day. The purpose of the warm compress is to open the pores of the oil glands to allow proper drainage so the eyelid can heal.

Clean the eyelid margin and the entire eyelid with a mild soap such as baby shampoo, or an over the counter eyelid scrub that can be purchased at any pharmacy. Most styes will heal within 7-14 days.

If the stye does not improve within 3-5 days, treatment by an eye doctor is recommended. Your doctor may prescribe topical (ointment or cream) or oral antibiotics to help the stye heal.

What are the possible complications from a stye?

If a stye is not treated in a timely manner, it can rarely progress to cellulitis or preseptal cellulitis which is a serious complication that occurs when the infection spreads to the nearby soft tissues of the orbit.

If the above medicines are not effective at treating the hordeolum it has probably become a chalazion. Chalazion may resolve without treatment but often requires a minor surgery to remove, which can be done in the office by your ophthalmologist.

Prognosis of Styes

Styes are usually harmless and complications are very rare. However, they often recur. If you are having a problem with recurrent styes, there are measures you can take to prevent them, which are described below.

Preventing Styes

Preventing a stye is primarily a function of improved hygiene around the eyelid area. Regular use of eyelid scrubs (e.g. SteriLid Eyelid Cleanser or Ocusoft Lid Scrubs) will greatly reduce the incidence of stye formation. You may also use diluted baby shampoo to cleanse the base of your eyelashes.

There is some evidence that flaxseed oil or fish oil may help keep the oil flowing freely from the glands in the eyelids so they don't become clogged and susceptible to bacterial infection.

You should never share cosmetics with others. Eye makeup should be removed nightly and replaced every 3-6 months.