

# Problems with eyelashes may compromise your vision

Trichiasis, a very common eyelid abnormality, is defined as the misdirection of eyelashes inward towards the globe and can damage your eyes if not corrected promptly and correctly.

**W**e all know how uncomfortable it is to have a loose eyelash or other foreign object inside the eye, now imagine what it's like to have a group of eyelashes constantly touching the delicate eye area, almost like torture. That is what it must feel like for those who suffer from trichiasis, which is the abnormal growth of eyelashes in the direction of the inner eye, and not outward as would be normal. When this happens, the eyelashes remain in contact with the cornea, causing chronic irritation.

Dr. Chun Cheng Lin Yang, oculoplastic surgeon at the Hospital CIMA San José, said people with trichiasis demonstrate symptoms such as redness, tearing, irritation, discharge, foreign object sensation or having a speck in the eye feeling. Upon these symptoms, it is very common for trichiasis to be confused with other conditions such as conjunctivitis, dry eye, allergies, or obstruction in the tear ducts. If patients are incorrectly diagnosed and treated for these different conditions, the patient cannot expect to see the expected improvement.

As an oculoplastic surgeon, trichiasis cannot be discarded as one of the possible causes of these symptoms, even if it might seem to the patient hard to believe that the source of his discomfort lies in having lashes that are growing in the opposite direction. Some of the possible causes are aging, recurrent infections of eyelashes, poor cosmetic or reconstructive surgery of the eyelids, eyelid trauma, eyelid tumor, and chemical burns that may cause conjunctival scarring to shrink and change the position of the eyelid.

## To extract or eliminate

There are several treatments available to address this problem, which if not treated properly and promptly, can compromise the patient's vision. The procedures range from the more

conservative, which is the use of artificial tears to keep the eye well lubricated, combined with the removal of the eyelashes manually every three weeks, depending on how fast they grow. This is a temporary solution for those not wishing to undergo minimally invasive surgery or one more invasive.

Among the newest definitive treatments available is radiofrequency which involves the removal of the hair follicles of the eyelashes that are considered to be responsible for the problem. Through an electrical device the desired result is achieved by treating the individual hair follicle selectively without damaging other eyelid structures in the surrounding area. This treatment is done in the medical office and in 80 to 90% of cases require no more than one session and the patient is not incapacitated. At the 2-week mark the patient is evaluated and at 6 weeks the doctor can determine whether the treatment was completely successful.

If radiofrequency does not work, because the patient's follicles are very strong, then it will require surgery to remove the hair permanently. Surgery is the last option used when other methods fail.

If not treated early, trichiasis can cause a corneal ulcer or may become complicated by an infection that can spread to the back of the eye and eventually affect vision.

In addition to trichiasis, there are other malformations that can occur on the eyelids which may be confused with trichiasis. Known as entropion, which is the inversion of the eyelid, and distichiasis, which is the growth of a second row of eyelashes.

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