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## **Cold, Winter Air Has Come and Gone but Dry Eye Syndrome Can Linger All Year-Round**

*Essential fatty acids can help alleviate dry eye syndrome according to the South Carolina Optometric Physicians Association (SCOPA) and the American Optometric Association (AOA)*

**COLUMBIA, S.C. (April 3, 2012)** – Even though spring weather brings warmer, humid air, millions of Americans still experience discomfort associated with dry eye syndrome. Dry eye is a condition where the tears produced by the eyes lack sufficient moisture and lubrication, which is necessary to maintain good eye health and clear vision. Tears not only wash away dust from the eyes, but also soothe the eyes, provide oxygen and nutrients to the cornea, as well as help defend against eye infections by removing bacteria.

“People with dry eye can experience a variety of symptoms,” said Dr. XXXX, title. “The frequency and severity varies but may include irritated or gritty eyes, redness, burning, a feeling that something is in your eyes, blurred vision and even excessive watering.”

Dry eye syndrome can result when one or more of the eye’s layers fail to produce the right quantity or balance of tears. This condition has a multitude of causes but generally can stem from the following factors:

- **Age:** As Americans age, eyes naturally become drier. Consequently, the majority of people older than 65 experience some symptoms of dry eye.
- **Gender:** Women are more likely to develop dry eye with hormonal changes during pregnancy, while using oral contraceptives and following menopause.
- **Medications:** Decongestants, antihistamines and antidepressants are among numerous medications that can reduce tear production.
- **Medical Conditions:** Health issues associated with arthritis, diabetes, Sjögren’s syndrome and thyroid problems can produce dry eye symptoms.
- **Environment:** Dry climates and exposure to wind and smoke may trigger dry eye. It’s also important to blink regularly, especially if you work at a computer for long periods of time.
- **Eyewear/Surgery:** In some cases, long-term wearing of contact lenses may cause dry eye (or make eyes less comfortable if they are dry), and previous eye surgery, such as LASIK, may lead to a temporary decrease in tear production.
- **Cosmetics:** When the lid margin is coated with heavy makeup, it can block the openings of the oily glands, which help lubricate the eye.

Treatment for dry eye syndrome varies depending on the severity. Some people can use artificial tears or similar eye drops or ointments that simulate the action of tears, but most will require medication prescribed by their optometrist. There are also oral capsules that can help the eyes maintain tear production and guard against future tear loss. The SCOPA and the AOA recommends consulting an eye doctor to diagnose the condition and discuss the proper treatment to help ease the discomfort. According to eye doctors,



some over-the-counter eye drops will actually have an adverse effect on dry eye symptoms.

Additionally, consumers can help alleviate symptoms of dry eye by following a more holistic approach, such as:

- Eating fish or taking a nutritional supplement that contains polyunsaturated fatty acids.
- Increasing humidity in your home and/or office.
- Blinking more frequently, especially when reading or staring at a computer screen, as well as lowering the computer screen to at or below eye level.
- Wearing sunglasses with wraparound frames to reduce exposure to wind and sun.
- Drinking plenty of water to avoid dehydration.

“Nutrition plays a big role in a person’s overall health, including their vision,” said Dr. XXX. “Eating healthy by adding the benefits of omega-3 fatty acids found in fish and nutritional supplements can play a role in preventing or easing the discomfort of dry eye.”

Several new studies have confirmed the correlation between fatty acids and an improvement in dry eye syndrome. Salmon, tuna, herring, mackerel and other cold-water fish are rich in omega-3 fatty acids and can help reduce inflammation, enhance tear production and support the eye’s oily outer layer as well as provide health benefits for your cardiovascular, immune and nervous systems.

Beyond discussing symptoms and treatments of dry eye syndrome with your optometrist, the SCOPA and the AOA also recommends adults have yearly eye exams. Based on an individual’s eye health, an eye doctor may recommend more frequent visits.

To find an optometrist in your area, or for additional information on how best to cope with dry eyes, please visit [www.sceyedoctors.com](http://www.sceyedoctors.com) or [www.aoa.org](http://www.aoa.org).

**About the American Optometric Association (AOA):**

*The American Optometric Association represents approximately 36,000 doctors of optometry, optometry students and paraoptometric assistants and technicians. Optometrists serve patients in nearly 6,500 communities across the country, and in 3,500 of those communities are the only eye doctors. Doctors of optometry provide two-thirds of all primary eye care in the United States.*

*American Optometric Association doctors of optometry are highly qualified, trained doctors on the frontline of eye and vision care who examine, diagnose, treat and manage diseases and disorders of the eye. In addition to providing eye and vision care, optometrists play a major role in a patient’s overall health and well-being by detecting systemic diseases such as diabetes and hypertension.*

*Prior to optometry school, optometrists typically complete four years of undergraduate study, culminating in a bachelor’s degree. Required undergraduate coursework for pre-optometry students is extensive and covers a wide variety of advanced health, science and mathematics. Optometry school consists of four years of post-graduate, doctoral study concentrating on both the eye and systemic health. In addition to their formal training, doctors of optometry must undergo annual continuing education to stay current on the latest standards of care. For more information, visit [www.aoa.org](http://www.aoa.org).*

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