Blepharospasm

Blepharospasm is an abnormal, involuntary blinking, movement, or spasm of the eyelids.

CAUSES

Anyone can have an eye twitch from time to time. In most cases, there is no clear cause. Eyelid spasms may be associated with or prolonged by:

- Alcohol.
- Caffeine.
- Fatigue.
- Irritation of the eye surface or inner eyelids.
- Lack of sleep.
- Physical exertion.
- Smoking.
- Stress.

Chronic, uncontrollable eyelid movement affecting both eyes is known as benign essential blepharospasm. This is not a common problem. Although its exact cause is unknown, the following conditions sometimes come before or during a problem of benign essential blepharospasm:

- Eyelid infection (*blepharitis*).
- Dry eyes.
- Light sensitivity.
- Pink eye (*conjunctivitis*).

Rarely, eye twitch may be a sign of certain brain and nerve disorders. When it is, there are almost always other signs and symptoms. Brain and nerve disorders that can cause eye twitch include:

- Bell's palsy.
- Benign essential blepharospasm.
- Dystonia.
- Parkinson’s Disease.
- Side effects of drugs, particularly medications used to treat epilepsy and psychosis.
- Spasmodic torticollis (a different type of muscle spasm sometimes accompanied by blepharospasm).
- Tourette syndrome.

SYMPTOMS

Random eye twitching can come and go for a few days, weeks or months. The spasms do not hurt, but they can be annoying. In its most common, harmless form, eye twitching stops on its own. It may recur off and on for no reason. The onset of blepharospasm may include:

- The develop blepharospasm without any warning signs.
- A gradual increase in blinking or eye irritation.
- Other symptoms including:
  - Fatigue.
  - Emotional tension.
  - Sensitivity to bright light.

Symptoms may lessen or stop while:

- A person is sleeping.
- Concentrating on a specific task.

If the condition progresses, the symptoms become more frequent. Facial spasms may develop. This is rare and may be the earliest sign of a more chronic movement disorder.

TREATMENT

To date, there is no successful cure. Several treatment options can reduce its severity.

- In some places, Botox shots into the muscles of the eyelids is an approved treatment. Botulinum toxin temporarily paralyzes the muscles of the eyelids.
- Other medications can have unpredictable results. Any symptom relief is usually short term. They tend to be helpful in only a small percentage of cases.
- A surgical procedure to remove some of the muscles and nerves of the eyelids (*myectomy*) is also an option. This surgery has improved symptoms in 75 to 85 percent of people.

- Alternative treatments (the benefits of these alternative therapies have not been proven) may include:
  - Biofeedback.
  - Acupuncture.
  - Hypnosis.
  - Chiropractic treatment.
  - Nutritional therapy.

MORE INFORMATION

National Eye Institute
http://www.nei.nih.gov/health/blepha/
Most information courtesy of the NIH & National Eye Institute NEI.

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