



Cumbria Advisory Thyroid Service

INFORMATION SHEET



THYROID EYE DISEASE

Thyroid Eye Disease is also known as TED (for short)

Thyroid Eye Disease can occur in any one of the main types of thyroid diseases – ranging from hypothyroidism to hyperthyroidism. It is, however, mainly suffered by those with Graves' Disease. This is an auto-immune condition where your own antibodies turn against themselves, so instead of protecting your body against infections, they cause damage to the body's own cells. The one condition linked to Graves' Disease is known as *thyroid associated ophthalmopathy*, or (TAO) for short. This shows as bulging, watery eyes (exophthalmos).

There is also a problem with lid retraction, where the upper eyelids retract slightly and expose the white of the eyes more, creating a staring look. Usually, when the hyperthyroidism (Graves' Disease) is corrected, either by drugs, radio-iodine treatment or surgery, the eyes improve.

It is important that these patients are also referred to an Ophthalmologist (specialist in eye conditions). In the case of TED the damage is directed to the tissues behind the eyes. This swelling causes the eye to be pushed forward giving a starey-eyed appearance. In more severe cases the damage to the back of the eyes causes swelling and stiffness of the muscles that move the eyes, and this, in turn, can cause double vision, especially when moving the eyes from side to side. This is because the damaged muscles cannot keep the eyes in line with each other. The muscle problem and double vision is also suffered by those with hypothyroidism, especially those with the associated condition known as *fibromyalgia*.

Treating all thyroid conditions must be done with diligence by your medical advisors. Constant blood tests, to evaluate the balance of the hormones, are essential, and are in all cases, the most important first step of the treatment of TED.

Double vision alongside the protuberant eye is one of the more severe symptoms. However there are other symptoms associated with a dysfunctional thyroid, such as:

- Dryness, soreness and gritty eyes
- Dislike of bright light
- Watery eyes
- Pain and discomfort behind the eyes
- Puffiness of the eyelids and surrounding tissue, known as “baggy eyes”
- Blurring vision
- Difficulty in focusing

- Headache or pain behind either one or both eyes

TREATMENTS

- Eye drops – known as “artificial tears” will usually give relief to sore and gritty eyes – one is known as Hyporomallose.
- Tinted lenses will alleviate the problem of bright lights – your optician has many ways to help with this.
- Watery eyes are usually worse in cold and windy conditions or again with bright lights. You can have side flaps fitted to your spectacles by your optician and this can help protect your eyes from the cold air.
- Pain and discomfort behind the eyes can be helped by simple analgesics such as paracetamol. This should be assessed by your G.P.
- Puffiness of the eyelids could be helped by sleeping with an extra pillow and sleeping in a more upright position to drain the congestion of fluids in the upper torso. Again your G.P. may help by giving you a small dose of diuretic pills to help eliminate extra fluids.
- Blurring vision and difficulty in focusing can be alleviated by the “artificial tears” eye drops previously mentioned, but also must be assessed by the G.P. or by referral to optician or ophthalmologist.
- In less severe cases of double vision, prism lenses can be used to improve vision. This however, may only help now and again, and if that proves to be the case, then prism lenses are not the solution in your case.
- Staring or protuberant eyes can be treated with steroids, radio therapy or surgery.

It is generally and most likely not the case that TED sufferers will completely lose their sight. Balancing the thyroid hormones is the primary treatment and with the control achieved, the eye symptoms should mostly disappear.

C.A.T.S RECOMMENDS YOU ALWAYS SEEK YOUR DOCTORS ADVICE

Disclaimer

The purpose of this information leaflet is to help those suffering with thyroid disease. Whilst every effort is made to provide accurate information, it is impossible to ensure that the information given is relevant to every individual. No responsibility is accepted by CATS and it is recommended and essential, that if in any doubt about your condition, that you should always contact your doctor, specialist physician or surgeon to seek medical advice.