

Punctal plugs are tiny devices inserted into tear ducts to block drainage of tears. This increases the eye's tear film and surface moisture to relieve dry eyes.

Also known as punctum plugs, lacrimal plugs or occluders, these devices often are no larger than a grain of rice.

Punctal plugs usually are considered when lubricating eye drops fail to relieve your dry eye condition.

How are punctal plugs inserted in tear ducts?

Many eye doctors need only a lighted, close-up examination of your eye to determine the size and type of punctal plug you need. In some cases, a one-size-fits-all style of punctal plug may be used. In others, a sized punctal plug will be needed.

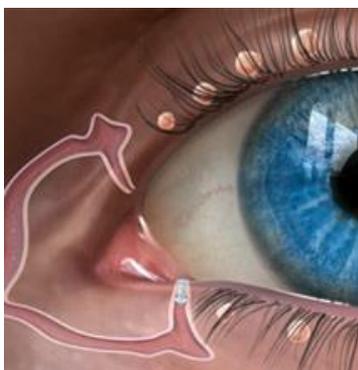
To prepare you for the procedure, some eye doctors use a local anesthetic drop before inserting the punctal plug. In many cases, no anesthetic is needed.

Each eyelid has one punctum, located at its inner margin near the nose. Punctal plugs can be inserted in the puncta of the lower lids, the upper lids or both. An instrument may be used to dilate the tear duct opening for easier insertion.

Many punctal plugs are pre-packaged with disposable devices that help your eye doctor insert the plug. Some punctal plugs are inserted just into the puncta so they still can be seen and mechanically removed if necessary.

Other than slight initial discomfort, you should not feel the punctal plug once it is in place.

Immediately after the procedure, you should be able to drive yourself home and resume normal activities.



Punctal plugs side effects and problems

Usually, punctal plug insertion is uneventful and rarely involves serious side effects or problems.

Excessive tearing (epiphora) and watery eyes can occur when the punctal plug does its job too well. In this case, you may need to visit your eye doctor for removal of the plug or replacement with a different type to better control the amount of tears on your eye.

Displacement or loss of the plug is common and can occur for many reasons, such as when people rub their eyes and accidentally dislodge the device. Some types of punctal plugs in particular are more likely to become dislodged and fall out. You will need to visit your eye doctor to receive a replacement punctal plug.

Eye infections may occur, though rarely, in association with the devices. In these cases, you may need treatment with topical antibiotics, oral antibiotics and/or removal of the punctum plug.

Other uncommon complications can occur when the plug unexpectedly migrates outside the target area and deeper into the eye's drainage channels. This can create blockages leading to conditions such as dacryocystitis, with swelling, pain and discomfort.

When should punctal plugs be removed?

While semi-permanent punctal plugs can last indefinitely, they also are easily removed. If you get excessive tearing and you feel that you no longer need them, they can be removed.