

Surgical Transient Ocular Discomfort Syndrome (STODS)

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What is it?

Grittiness, itchiness, intermittent sharp discomfort in the eye following eye surgery. It can last from a few days to a few months.

Which eye surgeries cause it?

It can occur following any surgery where the cornea (the clear “windscreen” of your eye) is incised. These include cataract surgery, ICL surgery, pterygium surgery and surface LASER vision correction (LASIK, transPRK and PRK).

Does it mean something is wrong?

No, it is a normal part of the eye healing after surgery.

Why does it happen?

The cornea has many nerve endings – this makes it very sensitive. This sensitivity is usually its safeguard against injury, so you notice if you get something in your eye or if you injure it. This sensitivity can be very apparent after surgery, as the corneal nerves are telling you that something is up... There are a few reasons for the sensitivity:

- When the cornea is incised these nerves are cut too, and as they reform over time there can be sensations associated with this. It is very similar to having a skin wound which can feel a bit “funny” for a time as the nerves grow back. It can take a few months for the sensation to fully settle.
- Tears coat the eye and nourish it – we call it “the tear film”. Around the time of surgery the tear film can be less stable, so the film does not coat the eye as evenly as it should and this stimulates the nerve endings in the cornea. The tear film instability is thought to occur

due to the various necessary agents used, e.g. the fluid to clean the eye and the eye drops used afterwards. Often the tear film will improve once the eye drops are ceased, but it can take a little longer for some people.

Is it just dry eye?

It has similar symptoms to dry eye, but it is related to the incision of the cornea – as above – so it is different in what causes it to occur.

If you have dry eye or tear film instability prior to surgery you are much more likely to experience STODS as your tear film is already compromised. It is a good idea to treat this prior to surgery, with drops and treatments such as Intense Pulsed Light (IPL).

What can I do about it?

Preservative free lubricants can help with symptomatic relief. You can use these as often as you like.

Your doctor may suggest treatments to stabilise the tear film such as IPL.

Staying hydrated and avoiding air conditioning or windy environments for the first few weeks after surgery will help reduce symptoms too.

If you have severe pain, or pain in the eye like an ache, or your vision is reducing, **contact us** and we can arrange to see you urgently. If you are unable to see us seek urgent ophthalmic care or attend the nearest emergency department.

Scan the QR code for more information about STODS on our website:

