

Medicines Optimisation

Best Practice Guidance for Care Homes

Eye Drops and Ointment

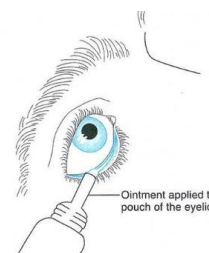
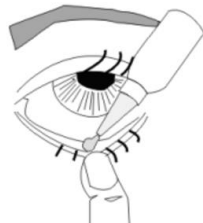
What are eye drops and ointments?

Eye drops or ointment are used to treat a number of eye conditions. The active ingredient varies depending on the condition being treated (the indication). Common types of eye drops or ointment include antihistamine, antibiotic, steroid or anaesthetic, although there are many more. Eye drops, ointments, or sprays can also be used as lubricants if a person is suffering with dry eyes. Eye ointment has a thicker consistency so may have a longer effect, which can allow less frequent administration.

Using eye drops or ointments^{1,2}

Encourage the resident to self-administer if appropriate. The person should sit or stand in front of a mirror and follow the procedure below. If carers are administering these products, they should also follow the procedure below. For some people it may be easier to apply the eye drops or ointments with them lying flat on their back.

- Wash and dry your hands.
- Check the expiry date or opening date to check they are safe to use.
- Shake the bottle if required.
- Remove the cap off the bottle or tube.
- Ask the person to bend their head backwards and gently, pull their lower eyelid down and ask them to look up.



- Hold the dropper above one eye. Squeeze **one drop** into the pocket formed by gently pulling down the lower eyelid. If applying ointment, squeeze a thin line of about 1 cm of the ointment into the pocket formed between the lower eyelid and the eye. Try not to touch the eye, eyelashes, or anything else with the dropper tip or nozzle to keep it clean.
- Let go of the eyelid and keep the eye closed for as long as possible (at least 2 to 3 minutes) after application of the eye drop or ointment. The person's head should be tilted down towards the floor.
- Press gently on the tear duct in a corner of the eye with one finger for one minute. Do not rub the eye.
- Wipe away any liquid that falls on the person's cheek with a tissue.
- Repeat in the other eye if the drop or ointment is prescribed for both eyes.

- If you feel the eye was missed when the drops were applied, you can safely try again immediately. Any excess will run out of the eye and will not cause any harm to the eye.
- When two different eye preparations are used at the same time of day, wait at least 5 minutes before putting the second drop into an eye. This stops the first drop from being diluted or washed away. If an eye ointment is being used at the same time as eye drops, always use the eye drops first and wait at least 5 minutes before applying the ointment.

Some useful tips about eye drops or ointments for carers and their residents²

- When not in use, ensure the lid of the bottle or tube is on and closed.
- Most eye drops and ointments should be stored in a cool dark place. Some eye drops or ointments must be stored in the fridge. Make sure you read the box and instructions when the medication is received from pharmacy to ensure they are stored in the appropriate place.
- Do not let the nozzle of the bottle or tube touch the eye lid, fingers or any other surface. This is to keep it free from germs.
- Eye drops and ointments must only be used for the person it is prescribed for. Never share drops or ointments between other people.
- Some eye drops come in disposable single dose units rather than bottles. These must be discarded after each use even if some of the drops remain.
- After application, some people may be able to taste the eye drops in their mouth or have a feeling that the drops are running down their throat. This is normal as the eye drops will mix with tears in the eye and will drain from the tear duct to the nose and mouth. To reduce this happening, gently press on the tear duct (inner corner of the eye) for at least a minute after applying the drops.
- Some eye drops or ointments can sting or irritate the eye for a short while after application. Some people are allergic to some eye drops or ointments although this is rare. Tell the GP if eye symptoms become worse after using eye drops or ointment.
- Eye drops or ointments may temporarily alter a person's vision. This is more likely with ointment as it is thicker. Where possible ointments should be administered at bedtime. Following administration, the person may be at a greater risk of falls for short period of time afterwards so should be monitored.
- People should not wear contact lenses while using eye drops or ointment unless otherwise advised by a Healthcare Professional. Some medication and preservatives in the eye drops or ointment can build-up in soft contact lenses and may cause harm.
- Keep eye drops or ointments out of reach of children.

There are devices available to help people who have difficulties squeezing the eye drop bottle accurately. Your pharmacist should be able to advise you on how to obtain one.

How long do eye drops and ointments last?

- Eye drops and ointments are sterile until the bottle is opened.
- When a new bottle or tube is opened, the date of opening should be recorded on the bottle or tube. Do not record the opening date on the box as this may become lost or damaged.
- When applying eye drops or ointments, the opening date must be checked each time to ensure they are still in date and appropriate to use.
- If eye drops or ointments are prescribed for both eyes, the same bottle or tube can be used for both eyes. The exception to this is antibiotic drops or ointments where a separate bottle or tube must be used for each eye. On opening antibiotic eye treatments, the eye for which it is being used for must be recorded on the bottle or tube.
- Some eye drops or ointments are intended for short term use only. For example, some courses of antibiotic drops or ointment are prescribed for five days only. Check with a clinician if you are unsure.
- Never use expired eye drops or ointments as they could be contaminated with bacteria or germs and may spread infection.
- Always complete the prescribed course and return any unused drops or ointment either to your pharmacy (residential homes) or via your clinical waste contractor (nursing homes).

Discard information

- Most drops or ointments must be discarded **28 days after opening**. These should be reordered every month.
- There are some exceptions to this rule. **Please read** the instructions on the leaflet or box and reorder prescriptions accordingly.
- Some eye drops can now be used for **90 days, or 6 months**. These must not be reordered monthly and stock remaining at the end of the cycle should be carried over to the new medicines cycle.

References

- 1. How to use eye drops www.patient.co.uk/health/how-to-use-eye-drops# Oct 2017 (accessed 27/11/24)
- 2 How to use your eye drops. Moorfield eye hospital. [How to use your eye drops - Moorfields Eye Hospital](http://www.moorfields.nhs.uk/eye-drops) (Jan 2018) accessed 27/11/24

Title	Best Practice Guidance – Eye drops and ointment
Description of policy	To inform healthcare professionals
Scope	Information for Care Home
Prepared by	Medicines Optimisation Team
Evidence base / Legislation	Level of Evidence: A. based on national research-based evidence and is considered best evidence B. mix of national and local consensus C. based on local good practice and consensus in the absence of national research based information.
Dissemination	Is there any reason why any part of this document should not be available on the public website? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes / No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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Version Control (To be completed by policy owner)

Version	Date	Author	Status	Comment
0.1.	December 2014.	Prescribing and medicines management team JC.	Draft	Discussed at SMT and some wording amendments made.
1.0.	Jan 2015.	Prescribing and medicines management team JC/SW.	Final	Wording amendments implemented
2.0.	Jan 2016.	Prescribing and medicines management team JC/SW.		Reviewed and references checked
2.1.	April 2018.	Describing and medicines management team SPC	Draft	AGEM logos added. Reviewed and update contents. References checked. Ointment administration information added. Title changed to include ointment
3.0	June 2018.	Prescribing and medicines management team.	Final	Approved by Senior Team, June 2018.
3.1.	October 2020.	Medicines optimisation team AGEM. BLS	Update.	Vita-POS change of name to Hylo-Night. Updated expiry dates on two items - reduced from six months to 90 days. References checked
3.2	April 2021.	Medicines optimisation team AGEM SMT discussion	update	Remove table sharing, specific eye drop brands and expiry date lengths. Add generic statement to read PIL to find out discard information
4.0	May 2021	Medicines Optimisation Senior Team	Final	Approved Senior Team meeting April 2021
4.1	Aug 2023	Medicines Optimisation Team – LE	Final	Uploaded to new template only
4.2	Nov 2024	Medicines Optimisation Team – HH	Draft	Review of contents. Additional information added about ointment and eye drop co-administration. Duration of antibiotic eye drops changed to 5 days. Ointment diagram added. Reference checked and new ones added as some out of date. Formatted.

