

Health + Prevention Sep 11, 2018

Do your eyes twitch?

Symptoms, causes, treatment and prevention

While normally harmless, twitching can occur all of a sudden and is regarded as highly irritating. What doctors refer to as fasciculation is commonly known as twitching. BETTER VISION explains the causes, how we can relax our eyes to overcome twitching, and what we can do to prevent it.

We're fully aware that our eyelids move regularly, covering our eyes with sufficient tear film. But if your eyelids are moving quickly and erratically, as if they're fluttering, then something's not quite right – and there are a number of possible causes. Normally, there's nothing to worry about.

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Symptoms:

If you notice your eyes start twitching, don't panic – in actual fact, only one eye is twitching. Twitching can take on many different forms – you'll either hardly notice it at all, or your upper or lower lid could be going haywire. Twitching is normally harmless, even if it lasts for several days.

Causes:

Twitching is normally triggered by stress, nerves, anxiety, too much caffeine, tired eyes (e.g. due to computer work or intensively using digital devices), high blood pressure or a lack of sleep. All of these factors put great strain on our nerves and can cause involuntary muscle spasms around the eyes. To be more precise, nerve discharges from the facial nerves (Nervus facialis) cause spontaneous twitching of the upper eyelid (Musculus levator palpebrae superioris) and the lower eyelid (Musculus orbicularis oculi).

A mineral deficiency, normally related to magnesium (hypomagnesiemia), is often cited as another cause. Magnesium is important for ensuring that muscles and nerves communicate well. In the event of a deficiency, the nerves may send incorrect signals to the muscles. In addition to twitching, this can also lead to leg cramps. A magnesium deficiency is often caused by eating unhealthy or unbalanced meals, but diarrhoea and diets are also possible causes. What's more, our bodies sometimes need more magnesium, for example during pregnancy or when doing regular exercise. Diabetes, chronic kidney diseases, celiac disease (gluten intolerance) and alcohol abuse can also lead to a magnesium deficiency. Your GP can find out whether you have a magnesium deficiency with a simple blood test.

In rarer cases, twitching can be caused by infections, neurological disorders, multiple sclerosis or brain tumours. It can also be caused by foreign bodies in the eyes, conjunctivitis, inflammation of the eye margin or small lesions on the cornea, e.g. as a result of incorrectly putting in your contact lenses. If twitching occurs in conjunction with signs of paralysis and language or vision disorders, such as seeing double, an emergency doctor should be consulted immediately as these could be early-warning signs of a heart attack or stroke.

Treatment:

Use a cloth dipped in hot water to ease acute symptoms. Place it on your eyelid for five to ten minutes; the heat can relax your muscles so much that the twitching will subside. A similar effect can be achieved using gel-filled glasses or masks. These can be purchased at a pharmacy or beauty and health retailer and can be used either hot or cold. Gently massaging the twitching eyelid can also ease symptoms. If the twitching is due to a magnesium deficiency, this can normally be fixed by eating foods that are rich in magnesium. These include peanuts and hazelnuts, spinach, sunflower seeds, millet, rice, beans, oatmeal and magnesium-enriched mineral water. Magnesium supplements can also quickly relieve acute twitching.

In general, as long as you don't experience twitching frequently, you don't need to worry about treating it. You only really need to go to the doctor if you suffer from twitching over several weeks, or if it gets worse. In this case, it's advisable to see a doctor. An eye doctor can determine whether or not a visual impairment might be causing the twitching. If left untreated, even a minor visual impairment can lead to overexertion of the eyes, which will lead to twitching. If you can't get an appointment with your eye doctor quickly, an optician can also perform an eye test to find out whether you have a visual impairment. If there's no evidence of a visual impairment, you should consult a neurologist to rule out causes like a brain tumour or nerve damage.

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Prevention:

Twitching can be avoided in a number of ways – it all depends on what’s causing it. If stress, too much caffeine, an unhealthy diet or a lack of sleep are thought to be the cause, a deficiency can be prevented by correcting these things. Relaxation techniques can help combat physical or mental stress. This can be done in a number of ways, e.g. through professional relaxation exercises, autogenic training, yoga, meditation, sports, getting more sleep, listening to calming music or taking a long walk. Massage can help, too – either on the affected part of the eye, on the head or on the back. If you spend a lot of time working at a computer and digital eyestrain is the cause of your twitching, a special pair of computer glasses can help prevent it.

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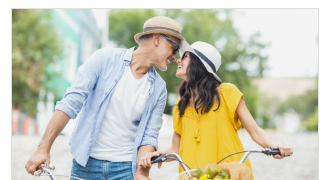
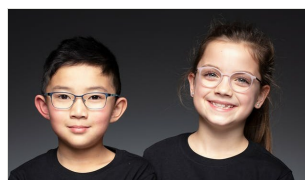
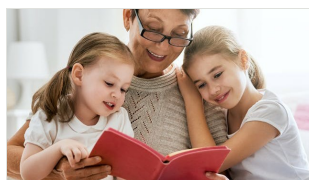
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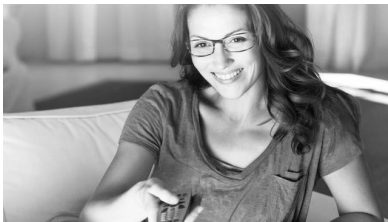
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