

TEARING AND THE TEAR DRAIN SYSTEM

Epiphora refers to excessive tearing. There are often several factors that can cause tearing, many of which may be present simultaneously. Some are related to over production of tears ("faucet" problems) and some to tear loss ("drain" problems). These may include but are not limited to: dry eye and reflex tearing, eyelid malposition, and blockage of the tear drainage pathway. One or all of these factors may need to be addressed in order to optimally improve tearing. This may require several consecutive treatments or procedures/surgeries in a stepwise fashion.

One cause of tearing is blockage at any point along the tear drainage system. This system includes a small opening in the inner corner of the upper and lower eyelids called the *punctum*, a narrow canal that extends toward the nose called the *canaliculus*, and a larger canal that carries the tears downward into the nose called the *lacrimal sac and duct*. Although obstruction can be seen at any point in this system, commonly it is in the lacrimal duct.

Symptoms of tear drainage dysfunction include excessive tearing, mucous discharge, and sometimes an infection in the lacrimal sac with a painful red nodule at the inner corner of the eyelids.

In most cases correction is with surgery to open the obstructed area or to create a bypass channel around it. For scarred puncta, the procedure is a simple two snip cut to enlarge the punctum. Canalicular reconstruction is more difficult and requires creating new channels with a silicone tube placed temporarily. When the blockage is in the lacrimal duct, a dacryocystorhinostomy (DCR) is performed through a small incision along the side of the nose to create a new drainage passage from the lids into the nose. This is done as an outpatient procedure under general anesthesia and takes about 45 to 60 minutes.



