

## Watery eyes in infants

- Tears are produced in glands under the eyelids. They moisten the eye surface and then drain down channels, called tear ducts, at the inner corners of each eyelid into the nose. Tears keep the eye clean and prevent infections, such as conjunctivitis.
- Sometimes in infants the tear ducts do not develop properly. The flow of tears is blocked and the infant has watery eyes.
- In most cases, tear ducts unblock by themselves by the age of 12–18 months. If they do not, an operation may be necessary. If, whilst waiting to see if the problem improves spontaneously, your child gets a red sticky eye, a short course of antibiotic drops or ointment will be needed. If, as is often the case, your child's eyelids are continually sticky but not red then bathe them with cotton wool soaked in cooled, boiled water.
- If the eyes continue to water despite waiting, then an eye specialist can perform a minor operation. It is a day-case procedure requiring a light general anaesthetic. A small probe is passed into the tear duct on the inner corner of the lower eyelid to unblock it; removal of the probe allows tears to flow into the nose.
- Immediately after the operation, your child will be given antibiotic drops to protect against infection. If the child's eyes are still watery several months later, the operation can be repeated. Sometimes a fine plastic tube is placed into the tear duct to stop it sealing over again. The tube can be removed in out-patients after a few months.

