

What Are Chalazia and Styes?

A chalazion and a sty are both lumps in or along the edge of an eyelid. In some situations it may be difficult to distinguish between a chalazion and sty.

A sty often appears as a red, sore lump near the edge of the eyelid, caused by an infected eyelash follicle. When a sty occurs inside or under the eyelid, it is called an internal hordeolum (pronounced "hor-dee-OH-lum").



The term chalazion (pronounced kuh-LAY-zee-un) comes from a Greek word meaning "small lump." A chalazion forms when an oil-producing gland in the eyelid called the meibomian gland becomes enlarged and the gland opening becomes clogged with oil.

Chalazia tend to develop farther from the edge of the eyelid than styes. Often larger than sty, a chalazia usually isn't painful. It is not caused by an infection from bacteria, and it is not a cancer. Sometimes, when a sty doesn't heal, it can turn into a chalazion.

Chalazion and Sty Symptoms

Symptoms of a sty at first generally include eyelid tenderness and redness in the affected area, with irritation and scratchiness in the eye. Further symptoms of a sty include:

- A red bump along the edge of the eyelid at the base of the eyelashes, usually with a small puss spot in the center;
- A feeling as if something is in your eye;
- Sensitivity to light;
- Crusting along the eyelid margin;
- Tearing.

About 25 percent of chalazia have no symptoms and will go away without any treatment. Sometimes, however, a chalazion may become red, swollen and occasionally may be tender. A larger chalazion may also cause blurred vision by distorting the shape of the eye. Occasionally, a chalazion can cause the entire eyelid to swell suddenly.

Who Is at Risk for Chalazia or Styes?

Anyone can develop a chalazion or stye, but if you have [blepharitis](#), a condition affecting the eyelid margins, you may be more likely to get either one.

You may also have an increased risk of developing chalazia or styes if you:

- Have had chalazia or styes previously;
- Have skin conditions such as acne rosacea or seborrheic dermatitis;
- Have other systemic medical conditions, such as diabetes.
- Consistently don't remove eye makeup completely;
- Use old or contaminated cosmetics.

What Causes Chalazia and Styes?

A painful, tender stye (also called a hordeolum) is usually caused by a bacterial infection. A stye will develop at the base of an eyelash if the eyelash follicle (root) is infected. This is usually called an external hordeolum. A stye will also develop if there is an infection in one of the tiny lubricating oil glands (called meibomian glands) inside or under the eyelid. When this occurs, it is usually called an internal hordeolum. A stye can also be caused by widespread inflammation of the eyelid from [blepharitis](#), a condition that affects the eyelid margins.

A chalazion develops when an oil gland in the eyelid becomes blocked. If an internal hordeolum doesn't drain and heal, it can turn into a chalazion. Unlike a stye, a chalazion is usually painless.

Chalazion and Stye Treatment

It is important not to squeeze or try to "pop" a chalazion or stye. This may spread the infection into the surrounding eyelid tissue.

[Symptoms](#) of a chalazion or stye are treated with one or more of the following methods:

Warm compresses

Soak a clean washcloth in hot water and apply the cloth to the lid for 10 to 15 minutes, three or five times a day until the chalazion or stye is gone. You should repeatedly soak the cloth in hot water to maintain adequate heat. The warm compress should allow the clogged gland to open and drain white or yellow discharge. If the gland opens, gentle massage around the stye or chalazion may help drainage.

Antibiotic ointments

An antibiotic ointment may be prescribed if bacteria infect a chalazion, or if a styne does not improve after treatment with warm compresses or if it keeps coming back.

Steroid injections

A steroid (cortisone) injection is sometimes used to reduce swelling of a chalazion.

Surgical removal

If a large chalazion or styne does not heal after other treatments or if it affects your vision, your Eye M.D. may need to drain it in surgery. The procedure is usually performed under local anesthesia in your ophthalmologist's office.

Chalazia and styes usually respond well to treatment, although some people tend to have them recur. If a chalazion comes back in the same place, your ophthalmologist may suggest a biopsy (where a tiny piece of tissue is surgically removed and studied) to rule out more serious problems.

Don't wear eye makeup or contact lenses until after the styne or chalazion heals.