

What Is an Eyelid Spasm or Twitching Eyelid?

Eyelid spasm, or twitching (which is also called blepharospasm), is an abnormal, involuntary blinking or movement of the eyelids. The blinking can happen every few seconds and may even be strong enough to make your eyelid shut entirely before reopening.

The spasms can last for irregular periods of time, from days to months, and may come and go at random. While the twitching is not painful, it can be annoying. For most people, the twitching eventually goes away on its own, although it may sometimes return.

You should see your ophthalmologist (Eye M.D.) if any of the follow occur:

- The twitching lasts longer than a week;
- Your eyelid involuntarily closes after each twitch;
- Your eye is red, swollen or has discharge, or your eyelids are drooping.

In a very few cases, eye twitching may be an early symptom of a chronic movement disorder, especially if other facial spasms develop in addition to the eye twitching. If you develop twitching or spasms elsewhere on your face, you should seek immediate medical attention.

Eyelid Spasm and Twitching Causes

Eyelid spasm or twitching (blepharospasm) is associated with an abnormal function of the basal ganglion, the part of the brain responsible for controlling the muscles.

Blepharospasm can happen to anyone, and the causes in any given individual may not be clear. Its onset can come without any warning. Sometimes the twitching eases or disappears altogether when a person is sleeping or concentrating on a task.

Some things are associated with the development of an eye twitch or may prolong it. These include:

- Alcohol
- Caffeine
- Fatigue
- Irritation of the eye surface or inner eyelids
- Lack of sleep
- Physical exertion
- Smoking
- Stress

In rare cases, heredity may be involved in the development of blepharospasm.

Other eye conditions may precede blepharospasm or occur at the same time. These include blepharitis, dry eye, light sensitivity and pink eye (conjunctivitis).

Very rarely, eye twitching may be a sign of a brain or nerve disorders, such as Bell's palsy or Parkinson's disease. In such cases, the eye twitching is usually just one of a number of symptoms.

Eyelid Spasm and Twitching Treatment

A full exam by an Eye M.D. is necessary to determine the cause of the eye twitching and to rule out any underlying neurological disorder. In many cases no cause is found. In such cases, a diagnosis of benign essential blepharospasm is made.

Minor eye twitching does not require treatment because it usually disappears on its own. Reducing stress, increasing your amount of sleep and decreasing caffeine intake may help to relieve eyelid twitches.

There is currently no cure for blepharospasm, but several treatments can reduce its severity. The most common treatment involves injecting botulinum toxin–derived medicines into the muscles of the eyelids. The toxin paralyzes the muscles of the eyelids, reducing the twitching. The injections often improve symptoms, but the injections need to be repeated over time.

In more severe cases, myectomy, a surgical procedure to remove some of the muscles and nerves of the eyelids, is a possible treatment option. This surgery has improved symptoms in 75 percent to 85 percent of people with blepharospasm.