What can I do for the stye on my eye? [1]

Hi Alice,

What do you do for a stye on your eye? It's swelled almost shut.

Answer
Dear Reader,

Eye, eye, eye, that sounds like a painful situation. Styes (also spelled sty), a red, tender, and swollen bump, are typically caused by a bacterial infection. There are two types of styes: external (found near the base of an eyelash and caused by an infection of the hair follicle) and internal (found under the eyelid and caused by infection of an oil-producing gland). They may cause eyelid pain, tearing, and as you've discovered, swelling. But fear not, for there are many ways to treat a stye!

Although most styes go away on their own within a few days, you might try applying warm compresses three to five times daily for 10 to 15 minutes at a time to soothe the stye and possibly help it resolve more quickly. However, if the infection doesn't clear up on its own or if it spreads, a health care provider may prescribe an antibiotic ointment or drop. Additionally, if it starts to impact vision they may need to surgically lance or drain the area to relieve pressure and swelling. Since you describe your eye as being swelled almost shut, it may be helpful to pay a visit to seek medical care to get a proper assessment and treatment.

For now, try to avoid touching or rubbing your eye during the day, because you may spread the infection. Although styes are not generally considered likely to spread to your other eye or to be contagious between people, careful, frequent handwashing with soap may help prevent the spread of infection. Additionally, don't squeeze or pop a stye. Finally, avoid wearing any eye makeup or contacts until the stye has healed.

How might you prevent styes in the future? You may try cleaning your eyelid with a clean, warm cloth a couple times a day, in an effort to avoid developing another stye. Also, if you use eye cosmetics, wash it off before bed at night and throw away any older cosmetics, as they may harbor bacteria. Most cosmetics have their shelf life noted on the package, with eye cosmetics typically having a shorter shelf life than others. Finally, if you wear contacts, be sure they are clean when you pop them in to your eyes.

Hope this helps!

Alice!

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