Meibomian gland dysfunction
What is it, why does it occur and how may it be treated?

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Introduction
Although meibomian gland dysfunction (MGD) is a common, chronic, disabling disorder that influences the health and well-being of millions of people worldwide, there has been no global consensus on its definition, classification, diagnosis or therapy. To achieve this, the Tear Film & Ocular Surface Society (TFOS) sponsored the International Workshop on Meibomian Gland Dysfunction (www.TearFilm.org). This Workshop required over two years to complete and involved more than 50 leading experts from around the world. The Workshop Report is now published in IOVS 2011; Vol. 52, No. 4. Some highlights of the Workshop and its recommendations appear below.

What is MGD?
The Workshop defined MGD as follows:

Meibomian gland dysfunction (MGD) is a chronic, diffuse abnormality of the meibomian glands, commonly characterized by terminal duct obstruction and/or qualitative/quantitative changes in the glandular secretion. This may result in alteration of the tear film, symptoms of eye irritation, clinically apparent inflammation, and ocular surface disease.

MGD is classified into two major types based on meibomian secretion: 1) Low Delivery States – the most frequent cause, and 2) High Delivery States (Figure 1). Ultimately, MGD can lead to alterations of the tear film, symptoms of eye irritation, inflammation of the ocular surface and dry eye.

Figure 1. Classification of MGD

Figure 2. Pathophysiology of obstructive MGD

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CLINICAL DESCRIPTION

**Stage 1**

No symptoms of ocular discomfort, itching or photophobia

**Clinical signs** of MGD based on gland expression

- Minimally altered secretions: Grade ≥ 2 - < 4
- Expressibility: 1
- No ocular surface staining

**TREATMENT**

- Inform patient about MGD, the potential impact of diet and the effect of work/home environments on tear evaporation, and the possible drying effect of certain systemic medications
- Consider eyelid hygiene including warming/expression as described below (+)

**Stage 2**

Minimal to mild symptoms of ocular discomfort, itching or photophobia

- Minimal to mild MGD clinical signs
- Scattered lid margin features
- Mildly altered secretions: Grade ≥ 4 - < 8
- Expressibility: 1
- None to limited ocular surface staining
  
  [DEWS grade 0-7; Oxford grade 0-3]

**TREATMENT**

- Advise patient on improving ambient humidity; optimizing workstations and increasing dietary omega-3 fatty acid intake (+)
- Institute eyelid hygiene with eyelid warming (a minimum of four minutes, once or twice daily) followed by moderate to firm massage and expression of MG secretions (+)
- All the above, plus (+)

  - Artificial lubricants (for frequent use, non-preserved preferred)
  - Topical emollient lubricant or liposomal spray
  - Topical azithromycin
  - Consider oral tetracycline derivatives

**Stage 3**

Moderate symptoms of ocular discomfort, itching or photophobia with limitations of activities

- Moderate MGD clinical signs
- Lid margin features: plugging, vascularity
- Moderately altered secretions: Grade ≥ 8 - < 13
- Expressibility: 2
- Mild to moderate conjunctival and peripheral corneal staining, often inferior [DEWS grade 8-23; Oxford grade 4-10]

**TREATMENT**

- All the above, plus

  - Oral tetracycline derivatives (+)
  - Lubricant ointment at bedtime (+)
  - Anti-inflammatory therapy for dry eye as indicated (+)

**Stage 4**

Marked symptoms of ocular discomfort, itching or photophobia with definite limitations of activities

- Severe MGD clinical signs
- Lid margin features: dropout, displacement
- Severely altered secretions: Grade ≥ 13
- Expressibility: 3
- Increased conjunctival and corneal staining, including central staining [DEWS grade 24-33; Oxford grade 11-15]
- Signs of inflammation: e.g. moderate conjunctival hyperemia, phlyctenules

**TREATMENT**

- All the above, plus

  - Anti-inflammatory therapy for dry eye (+)

**Key:**

- **Meibum quality** is assessed in each of 8 glands of the central third of the lower lid on a 0-3 scale for each gland: 0 = clear meibum; 1 = cloudy meibum; 2 = cloudy with debris (granular); 3 = thick, like toothpaste (range 0-24).
- **Expressibility of meibum** is assessed from 5 glands: 0 = all glands expressible; 1 = 3-4 glands expressible; 2 = 1-2 glands expressible; 3 = no glands expressible. This can be assessed in the lower or upper lid.
- **Numerical staining scores** refer to a summed score of staining of the exposed cornea and conjunctiva. The Oxford scheme has a scale range of 0-15 and the DEWS scale has a range of 0-33.

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