

## **Information on Chalazions**

### **What is a chalazion?**

A chalazion (usually pronounced *shuh lay' zee un*) is a bump on the eyelid, which is initially red and swollen, and later often just a hard nodule under the skin.

### **What causes a chalazion?**

A chalazion results from inflammation of oil glands, known as meibomian glands, which begin deep within the eyelid and extend to the edge of the lid. A chalazion may arise either away from the lid edge or at the lid edge. Oils secreted by the meibomian glands normally form a microscopic layer on the surface of the watery tears, reducing evaporation and helping the tears cover the surface of the eye more smoothly and evenly.

Inflammation results when the opening of a meibomian gland at the edge of the lid is blocked, causing oils within the gland to back up and extrude into the surrounding lid tissue. The extruded oils, not bacteria, cause the redness and swelling.

Blockage at the mouth of an oil gland is caused by swelling around the opening or thickening of the oils in the gland. Swelling may be caused by bacteria normally found on the skin. Thickening of the oils may result from a person's own body chemistry or from changes in the oils produced by the same bacteria infecting the edge of the lid.

### **What is the difference between a stye and a chalazion?**

Styes occur near the edge of the lid and usually resolve more quickly than chalazia. Antibiotics may be more helpful in clearing styes than chalazia. The area of redness and swelling will usually "point" or "come to a head" as white blood cells gather to fight the infection.

### **What problems does a chalazion cause?**

Lid appearance worries patients and parents most. Discomfort may be a problem, especially at first. Larger chalazia can press on the cornea enough to distort vision. In young children this can cause amblyopia, the vision loss which results when the brain begins to ignore the eye with blurrier vision.

### **How is a chalazion treated?**

There is a variety of treatments which may be used, alone or in combination:

- 1) Warm compresses - use a warm washcloth over the eyes for 5 minutes, 3 times a day. The "Bed Buddy", a sock-like heating pad which is warmed in the microwave, may work even better. Heat improves blood flow in the area and helps the body fight the inflammation.
- 2) Cleaning the eyelids and lashes - use Johnson's Baby shampoo, on a clean finger or washcloth, to clean the closed lids and lashes, eliminating harmful bacteria and removing crusts and debris.
- 3) Antibiotic ointment - use antibiotic eye ointment on the eyelids and lashes at bedtime for several weeks. In some cases ointment on the eye itself may be helpful.
- 4) Antibiotic by mouth - oral antibiotics are occasionally required.
- 5) If all these methods fail, the chalazion may be surgically drained. This is an outpatient procedure, which for children requires a brief general anesthesia.