

# Opening your child's tear passages

Information for parents from  
the 3V2 Eye Clinic

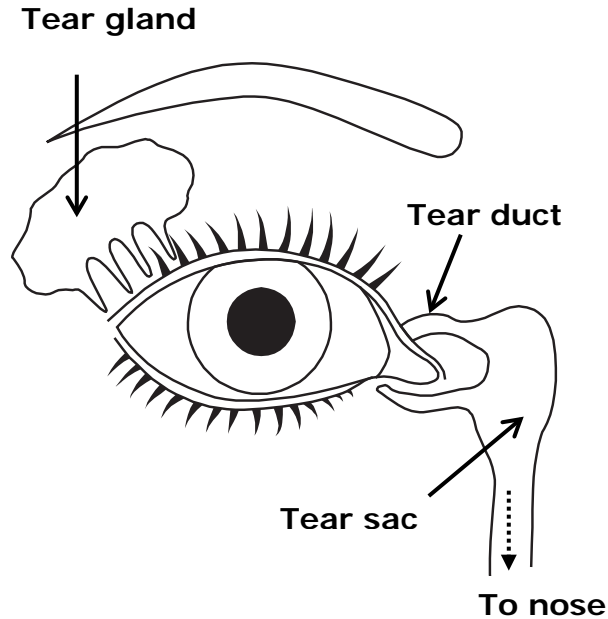
By using a thin probe, the doctor can open your child's tear passages, letting tears flow normally.

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## What are tear passages?

Tears are made in a gland above the eye. They flow over the front of the eye and drain into tear ducts in the eyelids, near the nose. Then, they flow into a tear sac, which drains into the nose.

This picture shows the tear passages:



When babies are born, their tear ducts are not fully open. The tears cannot drain away. They stay around the eyes and in the tear sac, causing watery eyes. The problem may get better on its own or with massage.

## When is treatment needed?

If massage does not work or the eye gets infected often, the doctor may recommend probing the tear passages.

## **What does probing involve?**

Probing cannot be done while your child is awake. Your child will have a general anesthetic so that he or she will be asleep and not feel any discomfort or pain. The procedure takes about 10 minutes.

When your child is asleep, the doctor gently passes a thin metal probe through the opening of the tear duct, into the tear sac and down into the nose. This stretches and opens the tear passages, without cutting them.

Sometimes, a very small camera called an endoscope is placed in the nose to see where the tear duct opens into the nose and make sure the probe has gone down the tear passages correctly.

After probing, sterile water mixed with a green dye is flushed through tear duct into the nose to make sure the tear passages are open.

## **What are the risks with probing?**

Probing does not usually cause any problems.

Although it is uncommon, it is possible that the probe could create a false tear passage into the nose.

There are some risks with general anesthetic. Some children feel sick or throw up. Serious problems are rare. About 1 out of every 100,000 people having anesthetic may develop a problem leading to death.

## **What happens after the procedure?**

For a few days after the procedure:

- the eye lids may be swollen and little red
- the white of the eye may be red
- the tears and discharge from the nose may have a little blood

Your child can resume all his or her regular activities after the procedure.

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## When should I call the doctor?

Call the doctor if you are worried in any way.

If you are concerned and not able to reach the doctor, bring your child to the nearest hospital emergency room for medical care.

## What happens next?

If probing is successful, your child will visit the eye clinic 3 months after the procedure. If the eye is still watering and sticky, we will discuss other treatments. For example, small plastic tubes could be placed in the tear passages to stretch them open.

Sometimes probing is not successful, such as when:

- the eyelids have no openings for tear passages
- the openings for the tear passages have closed
- the tear passages are blocked

If probing has not worked, the doctor will see you after the procedure to explain the findings and talk about ways to manage the problem.

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