

There Are Mites Living in Your Eyelashes and You Don't Even Know It

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Yes, unfortunately you read that correctly: There are teeny tiny parasitic mites living in your eyelashes, and they've probably been there forever but you didn't know. This might just be one of those times where ignorance really is bliss. But, we should all be aware of these types of things, as they may, in some instances, affect our skin and overall health.

Demodex mites, also known as eye mites, love to make your lashes and brows their home. "They are small (invisible to human eye and only visible through a microscope) mites (a type of insect) that live naturally on human skin, especially those areas with an excess of oil glands (this includes the face—there are a high number of these glands on the eyelid lashline and around the eyebrows)," explains Seattle dermatologist Jennifer Reichel, MD. "They are normally considered harmless and live in a symbiotic nature with their host (us)."

New York dermatologist Debbie Palmer, MD, says that we acquire the mites shortly after birth, but they have been found to increase in number as we age. But do we all have them? Dr. Reichel

says you probably do. "Studies have shown rates that are less than 100 percent, however, the presence of Demodex mites depends on where the sample is taken from. I would suspect that between 50 and 100 percent of adults have them on their skin. You can also acquire them through skin-to-skin contact with other individuals, and also pets. They are more present in adults because adults have more oil secretion than children (especially before puberty)."

Dr. Palmer explains that under normal conditions, these mites inflammatory response by the immune system to the Demodex mite," says Dr. Reichel. "They may also cause inflamed, itchy, red eyelids. Your dermatologist can diagnose this in the office.

Treatment typically includes warm compresses and topical medications such as Ketoconazole. Oral anti-fungals can be used in extreme or long-standing cases."

If you're wondering how to get rid of them, you're out of luck. Some people have reported wiping their lashes with tea tree oil wipes twice a day to reduce oil production in the area, in turn decreasing the amount of mites there, but it's not a permanent solution. "It's important to remember that these mites are considered NORMAL flora on our skin," says Dr. Reichel. "We have thousands of bacteria and other organisms that live in and within our bodies at all times."