What is a blocked tear duct?
As many as 6 percent of newborns have a blockage of a tear duct in the eye. This condition is called dacryostenosis or congenital (present at birth) lacrimal duct obstruction. Tears help clean and lubricate the eye and are produced in the lacrimal gland located under the bone of the eyebrow. Tears from the lacrimal gland go into the eye through tiny ducts along the eyelid. Tears drain through two small openings at the inner corner of the eyelids, and then drain into a larger passage from the eye to the inside of the nose, called the nasolacrimal (tear) duct.

In some babies, the openings into the nasolacrimal duct have not formed properly. This causes a blockage and the tears have no place to drain. A blocked tear duct can occur in one or both eyes. The blockage may be present at all times, or it may come and go. You may notice it more commonly when your baby is congested, specifically, you may note mucus in the affected eye after laying down at night or for a nap.

What are the symptoms of a blocked tear duct?
Because infants do not produce tears until they are several weeks old, a blocked tear duct may not be noticed at birth. The following are the most common symptoms of a blocked tear duct. However, each child may experience symptoms differently. Symptoms may include:

- Tears pooling in the corner of your baby’s eye.
- Tears draining down your baby's eyelid and cheek.
- Mucus or yellowish discharge in the eye.
- Reddening of the skin from rubbing.
- A blocked tear duct may be noticeable only when a baby cries, or in cold or windy weather when tears are stimulated.

How is a blocked tear duct diagnosed?

- A blocked tear duct is usually diagnosed based on a complete medical history and a physical examination of your child. Additional tests are not usually required to confirm the diagnosis.

Treatment for a blocked tear duct:

- The most common treatment for a blocked tear duct is gently "milking" or massaging the nasolacrimal duct two to three times a day. Make sure that before you massage the eye, you wash your hands carefully, so that you do not contaminate your baby’s eye and bring on a full blown infection.
- Fortunately, nearly all blocked tear ducts heal on their own and usually by the time the child is 1 year old. If the duct remains blocked after this time, the duct opening can be enlarged with a small probe. This may need to be repeated, but this procedure is effective in most cases.
- Very few children require surgery to repair a blocked or defective tear duct.
- If the white part of the eye – known as the sclera, turns pink or red, please bring your child in for an examination of the eye, this may signal a true infection.

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