

## **Women unaware dry eye caused by menopause not contact lenses**

**Cambridge UK, 19 April 2012** – Hot flushes and sleepless nights might be the symptoms most commonly associated with the menopause, but a large proportion of women also experience dry or itchy feeling eyes. They are often unaware that this is caused by the same hormonal changes and should take extra precautions to protect their eyes during this time, comments Gareth Thomas of Altacor, the specialist ophthalmic pharmaceutical company.

“During the menopause, circulating levels of oestrogen and other hormones known as androgens, fall significantly,” explains Mr Thomas. “Older women often notice that their eyes have become more prone to irritation. Research is now emerging that androgen plays an important role in regulating the meibomian glands of the eye which are important in the production of the tear-film that protects the eye.”

“During menopause, the levels of androgens fall dramatically and this may explain why women are three times more likely than men of the same age to suffer from dry eye.”

Although you would be forgiven for thinking that tears were merely water, the tear-film is in fact a complex structure consisting of three individual layers. The meibomian glands are important as they slowly release oil into the tear film. This oil helps to stop the water in the tears from evaporating, thus helping to prevent dry eyes.

The important role of androgens was revealed in research by David Sullivan and colleagues at the Schepens Eye Institute<sup>1</sup> part of Harvard Medical School. His work has also shown that hormone replacement therapy increases the prevalence of dry eye signs and symptoms in post-menopausal women. Professor Sullivan has commented that physicians caring for women who are taking or considering HRT should be apprised of this potential complication.

Women going through the menopause can take precautions to protect their eyes. For example, by using preservative free eye drops, such as Clinitas Soothe developed by Altacor, are specially formulated to protect against dry eye.

However many opticians report that women think that the problem is with their contact lenses and stop wearing them.

Janet Wilkinson of Andrew Merry Optician’s has been part of a trial run by Altacor and NO7 contact lenses to assess the benefits testing for dry eye to aid diagnosis. She says:

“The trial went extremely well. Women often come in saying they have itchy eyes or a burning sensation and are thinking of stopping wearing their contact lenses. Others think they need a new prescription because their vision is starting to blur.

“The tests helped us to be much more accurate in our diagnosis,” explained Janet.

“Each patient is given a product or a combination of products from the Clinitas range to try, and then invited for a follow up visit 7-10 days later. If the patient has stuck to their regime we normally see great results then. People come back in smiling and often say this is because their eyes feel more comfortable.”

“Our lifestyles, especially air conditioning and central heating, are making dry eye more common. Women going through hormonal changes are particularly at risk of dry eye.

“Where possible, prevention is better than cure. In a similar way that women apply face cream to help with a dry skin, I feel prescribing the Clinitas gel as an overnight moisturiser really helps the eyes”

The eye drops work by strengthening the tear-film. This coats the outer surface of the eye, creating a smooth surface for light to pass through and providing a shield against infection. Each time we blink we replenish the tear-film, ensuring the cornea does not become damaged from dryness.

A problem with the tear film can lead to a disorder known as ‘dry eye’. Eyes may feel sore and itchy or even like they have grit in them. Confusingly, dry eye can also lead to watery eyes, especially when exposed to the wind.

Clinitas Soothe for daytime use and Gel for overnight are available from leading opticians on prescription from GPs and is also safe for use with contact lenses.

Ref. <http://www.schepens.harvard.edu/research-storydev/david-sullivan-phd/research-story.html>

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## **About Altacor**

Altacor is a specialty ophthalmology company with a portfolio of marketed pharmaceutical products and a diverse development pipeline. The Company’s portfolio is focused on ocular surface diseases, glaucoma/glaucoma surgery and retinal diseases. The Company differentiates its products primarily through formulation or reprofiling existing compounds with established clinical activity and systemic safety.

Altacor has five products marketed in the UK and Ireland which are commercialised through its own sales and marketing organisation and network. Clinitas and Clinitas GEL are prescription products for the treatment of moderate dry eye conditions and are gaining acceptance by clinicians nationwide. The Clinitas range, comprising Clinitas Hydrate, Clinitas Soothe and Clinitas Ultra 3, are also for treating the major causes of dry eye, and are sold to the retail market via pharmacists and opticians.

Altacor is developing its Blepharitis range of products to loosen and remove Meibomian secretions, which underlie blepharitis, and an ‘AREDS’ formula chocolate for the maintenance of healthy vision. AREDS is a well-established formula that slows the progression of age-related macular degeneration.