Eyelash Creatures

**Warning:** Gross Stuff Ahead, Read at Your Own Risk

Information and pictures gathered from:
http://www.worsleyschool.net/science/files/eyelash/creatures.html

Did you know that most people are hosts to **eyelash mites**?

Demodex folliculorum, or the demodicid, is a tiny mite, less than 0.4 mm long, that lives in your pores and hair follicles, usually on the nose, forehead, cheek, and chin, and often in the roots of your eyelashes. (A follicle is the pore from which a hair grows). Demodicids have a wormlike appearance, with legs that are mere stumps. **People with oily skin, or those who use cosmetics heavily and don't wash thoroughly, have the heaviest infestations** ... but most adults carry a few demodicids. Inflammation and infection often result when large numbers of these mites congregate in a single follicle.

These mites live heads-in in your eyelash follicle, feeding on sebaceous excretion and dead skin cells. The mites have tiny claws, and needlelike mouthparts for eating skin cells. Their bodies are layered with scales, which help them anchor themselves in the follicle. They come out to the skin surface at night to mate and return to the follicle to LAY THEIR EGGS! The eggs hatch and *tada!* you got babies and the population of eyelash mites you are host to increases exponentially. An individual female may lay up to 25 eggs in a single follicle, and as the mites grow, they become tightly packed. When mature, the mites leave the follicle, mate, and find a new follicle in which to lay their eggs. The whole cycle takes between 14 to 18 days.

Experts say that they do no harm except that if too many are in one follicle, **that eyelash will come loose and fall out easily**. The mite's digestive system results in so little waste that the mite doesn't even have an excretory opening. So although there may be mites in your eyelashes, there isn't any mite poop! Thank goodness! Sometimes demodex is called the 'face mite', since it is often associated with blackheads, acne and other skin disorders (although it is not the cause of these). However, large numbers of demodex mites may cause itching and skin disorders, referred to as Demodicosis.

If you think you are safe, you’re not! **MOST people have them.**

If you use eyeliner and mascara, you most definitely have more of them!

If you don’t wash off your eyeliner and mascara well, you probably already have an infestation.

*Thank you for your attention to this public safety announcement. We wish you a peaceful night’s sleep!*
And... here’s what they look like! That’s their heiny you see as their faces are buried into your follicle, feeding away....

This is one of the winning images by Science Photo Library photographers, in the 2004 Novartis and The Daily Telegraph Visions of Science Photographic Awards. Steve Gschmeissner, one of the leading UK scanning electron microscopists, created his image of eyelash mites as much for aesthetic appeal as well as its scientific content. The scanning electron microscope produces images in black and white, so a lot of post-production work is done by him in Adobe Photoshop to colour the images using a naturalistic palette.