



Conjunctivitis:

Managing Pink Eye

Conjunctivitis is an inflammation of the conjunctiva — the thin, transparent layer covering the surface of the inner eyelid and a portion of the front of the eye. The three main types of conjunctivitis are infectious, allergic and chemical. The infectious form, commonly known as “pink eye,” is caused by a contagious virus or bacteria. A reaction to pollen, cosmetics, animals or fabrics often bring on allergic conjunctivitis. Irritants like air pollution, noxious fumes and chlorine in swimming pools may produce the chemical form.

Symptoms

Common signs and symptoms of conjunctivitis are red eyes, inflamed eyelids, watery eyes, blurred vision and a gritty or scratchy feeling in the eyes. With the infectious form, there may be a puss-like or watery discharge around the eyelids. Allergic conjunctivitis is often associated with stringy white mucous.

Treatment

Certain forms of conjunctivitis can develop into a more serious condition that may harm your eyes and affect your vision. Therefore, it's important to have your condition diagnosed and properly treated quickly.

Infectious conjunctivitis, caused by bacteria, is usually treated with antibiotic eye drops and/or antibiotic ointment. Other infectious forms, caused by viruses, are fought off by your body's immune system. Treatment for a viral infection is primarily supported with artificial tears, cold compresses and antihistamine eye drops.

For those who suffer from allergic conjunctivitis, placing a clean face cloth soaked in ice-cold water over closed eyes can provide some comfort. Over-the-counter artificial teardrops can also help. Prescription medications, including antihistamines, may be considered for more severe symptoms.

The ideal treatment for chemical conjunctivitis is to remove the cause of the irritation. In cases where this doesn't work, prescription and over-the-counter eye drops are available. See your Doctor of Optometry to determine the form of conjunctivitis you have and the appropriate treatment.

Prevention

To avoid giving infectious conjunctivitis to others, keep your hands away from your eyes; thoroughly wash your hands frequently, as well as before and after applying eye medication; and avoid sharing pillows, towels, washcloths or cosmetics with others. Small children, who may forget these precautions should be kept at home until the condition has resolved.

Doctors of Optometry are a single source for all your vision, eye health and eyewear needs. For information about many other common eye-related conditions, visit our website's Eye Health Library. For answers to commonly asked questions, visit our Ask a Doctor of Optometry Facebook page at [facebook.com/AskaDoctorofOptometry](https://www.facebook.com/AskaDoctorofOptometry).



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