

CONJUNCTIVITIS (PINK EYE)

Conjunctivitis is the most common eye disease in the Western Hemisphere. It is an inflammation of the mucus membranes of the eye commonly caused by allergy, chemicals, pollution, and bacterial or viral infections. The common symptoms are redness, itching, swelling of the eye lids and a discharge that may cause the lids and lashes to be matted together in the mornings. There can be a scratchy feeling, pain with bright light, or tearing.

Bacterial Conjunctivitis

Caused by infection with diplococcus pneumonia or staphylococcus aureus, the predominant sign is a yellow mucus discharge. There is no pain or blurring of vision. If untreated, it usually lasts about two weeks. Antibiotic drops or ointment can clear the infection in 2 or 3 days.

Viral Conjunctivitis

This form of conjunctivitis may or may not be associated with a cold, and can cause tearing, but not much yellow mucus. There is no specific treatment, and the infection usually passes in about 10 days.

Allergic Conjunctivitis

Caused by sensitivity to pollens, drugs or cosmetics, this form is commonly associated with hay fever. Symptoms include itching, tearing and redness and can last as long as the allergen is present. Symptoms are seasonal or year round. Oral antihistamines and/or anti-allergy eye drops can be helpful.

Treatment

- Seek care to determine what type of conjunctivitis you have
- Apply cool compresses with a clean washcloth to reduce swelling and provide some comfort
- Keep your hands clean, and do not rub the eyes
- Remove the discharge/crust from the eyelashes by gently cleansing with "No Tears" type baby shampoo twice daily
- Do not apply eye make-up until all symptoms have disappeared

Proper Use of Ophthalmic Ointment or Drops

- Wash hands thoroughly
- Remove contact lenses before using ointment or drops. Contact lenses should not be worn until the course of treatment has been completed
- To improve flow of ointment, hold tube in hand several minutes to warm before use
- When opening ointment tube for the first time, squeeze out the first 1/4 inch of ointment and discard, as it may be too dry
- Gently pull the lower eyelid down

- Looking into a mirror, squeeze a small amount of ointment (1/2 to 1/4 inch) inside the lower lid as though inserting a contact lens.
- Do not touch the tip of the tube or cap to the eyes fingers or any surface (same technique for eye drops)
- Close eye gently and roll eyeball in all directions
- If you are using more than one kind of ointment at the same time, wait about 10 minutes before applying second ointment

Prevention

Although conjunctivitis may be hard to prevent, good hygiene is always helpful.

- Wash hands frequently and keep them away from the eyes, especially after handling cleaning solutions and chemicals
- Do not share cosmetics of any kind
- Do not use old eye make-up (eyeliner, mascara), replace with new products
- Do not share towels or washcloths
- Do not swim in stagnant lakes or ponds or in non-chlorinated pools
- Do not use eye drops or medications prescribed for anyone else
- If you wear contact lenses, follow the instructions for your particular lenses
- When reading for extended periods, lubricate frequently with a liquid lens product

Remember

Return to your health care provider if you develop any of the following:

- Severe eye pain
- Pain when moving the eyes
- Visual blurring or other changes
- Fever
- Continued discharge or drainage after use of the medication
- No improvement with the medication

