

PINK EYE: Conjunctivitis

WHAT IS PINK EYE?

Pink eye or conjunctivitis is an inflammation of the clear membrane (conjunctiva) that covers the eyelid and eye surface. If irritation or infection occurs, the lining becomes red and swollen. Although bothersome, pink eye rarely affects eye sight.

WHAT CAUSES PINK EYE?

VIRUSES

Viruses are the most common cause of pink eye. It usually affects one eye, but sometimes both. The affected eye(s) are pink to red, with tearing and a light clear to mucous discharge. Associated eyelid swelling as well as sensitivity to light can be present. Viral pink eye can spread to others if good handwashing techniques are not followed during an infection. Symptoms may last over a week and are often associated with a common cold.

- **Treatment for viral cases:** Like the common cold, there is no miracle cure. Treatment is symptomatic
 - ✓ Cool compresses
 - ✓ Artificial tears
 - ✓ Remove contacts and wear glasses
 - ✓ Antibiotic drops are not recommended by eye doctors
 - ✓ Drops to remove the red are not recommended

BACTERIA

Bacterial conjunctivitis may affect one or both eyes. It often has a thicker, yellowish-green discharge, more intense redness and much more discomfort and swelling of eyelids. It may or may not be associated with other upper respiratory infection.

- **Treatment for bacterial cases:**
 - ✓ Antibiotic drops or ointments as indicated
 - ✓ Moist compresses to remove crusts
 - ✓ Remove contacts and wear glasses
 - ✓ Wash hands frequently to prevent spread

ALLERGIC

Allergic conjunctivitis usually affects both eyes. Itchy, watery eyes and swollen eyelids are common symptoms. Other possible symptoms are sneezing and watery nasal discharge. This condition is a response to an allergy-causing substance such as pollen or other environmental agent.

- **Treatment for allergic cases:**
 - ✓ Limit exposure to allergen if possible
 - ✓ Cool compress
 - ✓ Remove contacts and wear glasses
 - ✓ Steroid nasal sprays, such as Flonase[®] or Nasacort[®], now over the counter. Although the medication is sprayed into the nose, it helps eye symptoms as well.
 - ✓ Antibiotic drops are not recommended
 - ✓ Allergy eye drops may be used
 - ✓ Non-sedating antihistamines such as Zyrtec[®] (cetirizine), Claritin[®] (loratidine), Allegra[®] (fexofenadine).

IRRITANT

Irritating substances may cause eye redness, itching, tearing, discomfort or pain. Possible offenders include smoke, soap, hairspray, makeup, air pollutants, chlorine, cleaning fluids, and vapors. Foreign objects such as an eyelash or contact lenses may be the cause also.

- **Treatment for irritant conjunctivitis:**
 - ✓ Removal of the irritant
 - ✓ Artificial tears
 - ✓ Limit contact use
 - ✓ Change contacts or solutions

Common Cold and the College Student

HOW ELSE CAN I GET RID OF SYMPTOMS?

- Wash hands frequently especially after touching eyes. Refrain from touching as much as possible.
- Apply cool compresses to infected eye(s) 3-4 times per day for 10-15 minutes. Use a clean wash cloth each time.
- Warm compresses in the morning will help remove drainage. Gently wipe away crusts.
- Avoid rubbing eyes to decrease irritation and redness.
- Wear sunglasses if eyes are sensitive to light.
- Throw away any possible exposed cosmetics like mascara and contacts.
- Always wash hands after applying pink eye treatment.
- Never save your prescription eye medication after treatment is completed.
- Avoid wearing contact lens while using medications or if your eyes are still bothering you. Wear prescription glasses during this period. Follow your doctor's instructions concerning contact lens use.
- Drops to get the red out are not recommended because the preservatives often aggravate the situation.