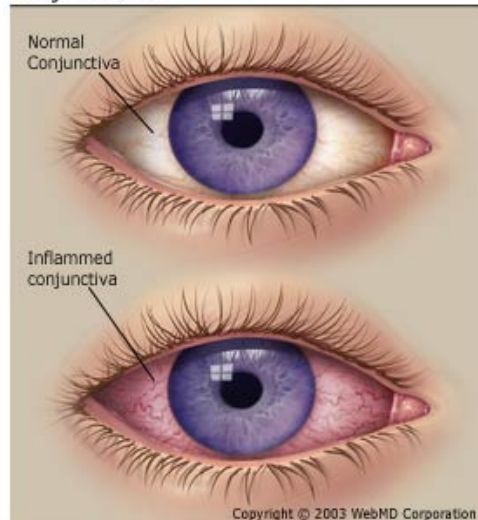


Allergic Conjunctivitis

Conjunctivitis is one of the most common and treatable eye conditions in children and adults. Often called "pink eye," it is an inflammation of the conjunctiva, the tissue that lines the inside of the eyelid and helps keep the eyelid and eyeball moist.

Viruses, bacteria, irritating substances (shampoo, dirt, smoke, pool chlorine), sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) or allergens (substances that cause allergies) can all cause conjunctivitis. Pink eye caused by bacteria, viruses or STDs can spread easily from person to person but is not a serious health risk if diagnosed promptly; allergic conjunctivitis is not contagious.

Conjunctivitis



It is important to find out whether your pink eye is caused by allergies or infection because each condition has different treatments. This article focuses on allergic conjunctivitis.

What Are the Symptoms of Allergic Conjunctivitis?

Symptoms of allergic conjunctivitis include:

- Redness in the white of the eye or inner eyelid
- Increased amount of tears
- Itchy eyes
- Blurred vision
- Swelling of the eyelid

See your ophthalmologist (a doctor and surgeon who is trained to treat eye conditions) optometrist (doctor trained to treat eye conditions) or family doctor if you have any of these persistent symptoms.

How Is Allergic Conjunctivitis Treated?

Allergy-associated conjunctivitis may disappear completely, either when the allergy is treated with antihistamines, or when the allergen is removed. Your doctor may recommend you use one or more of the following:

- **Ocular (topical) decongestants:** These medicines reduce redness by constricting small blood vessels in the eye. They are not recommended for long-term use. Using these drops for more than a few days can actually worsen symptoms.
- **Ocular (topical) antihistamines:** These medicines reduce redness, swelling and itching by blocking the actions of histamine, the chemical that causes these symptoms of allergy. They are available both over-the-counter and by prescription.
- **Ocular (topical) steroids:** When other medicines fail, your doctor may prescribe steroid eye drops to relieve the symptoms of conjunctivitis. These must be used with the supervision of your doctor since they can cause elevated pressure inside of the eye, which can lead to vision damage. Your doctor also must check for viral eye infections, such as herpes, before optical steroids are used. These drops can also increase the risk of cataracts, clouding of the lens of the eye that can impair vision.
- **Cromolyn:** This medicine works by preventing specialized cells from releasing histamine. It works best when started before symptoms occur.
- **Immunotherapy:** Allergy shots can be effective for treating allergic conjunctivitis.

What Can I Do to Relieve Symptoms?

To relieve symptoms of allergic conjunctivitis:

- Remove contact lenses, if you wear them.
- Place cold compresses on your eyes.
- Try nonprescription "artificial tears," a type of eye drop that may help relieve itching and burning (Note: Other types of eye drops may irritate the eyes and should not be used.) Do not use the same bottle of drops in the other eye if it is not affected.

The best defense against allergic conjunctivitis is a good offense: try to avoid substances that trigger your allergies.

Other Tips:

- Don't touch or rub the affected eye(s).
- Wash your hands often with soap and warm water.
- Wash your bed linens, pillowcases and towels in hot water and detergent to reduce allergens.
- Avoid wearing eye makeup.
- Don't share eye makeup with anyone else.
- Never wear another person's contact lens.
- Wear glasses instead of contact lenses to reduce irritation.
- Wash your hands before applying the eye drops or ointment to your eye or your child's eye.
- Do not use eye drops that were used in an infected eye in a non-infected eye.