

## DESCRIPTION

An inflammation (redness and soreness) of the conjunctiva. The conjunctiva is a clear membrane that covers the white part of the eye and the inside of the eyelids. Conjunctivitis is a very common condition.

## FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Symptoms vary depending on the cause.
- One or both eyes may be affected.
- Eye discomfort or pain.
- Gritty feeling in the eye (like sand in the eye).
- Redness of the eye (leading to the term "pinkeye").
- Clear, green, or yellow discharge from the eye.
- After sleeping, crust on lashes that cause eyelids to stick together.
- Swollen eyelids.
- Sensitivity to bright light.
- Intense itching (allergic type only).

## CAUSES

- Bacterial or viral infection. Conjunctivitis may occur with colds or childhood diseases such as measles. These infections can be spread from one eye to the other. They can also be spread from one person to another.
- Chemical irritation or dust, smoke, chlorine, and other types of air pollution or home chemicals.
- Allergies caused by cosmetics, pollen, animal dander, or other allergens. (Both eyes are usually affected.)
- A blocked tear duct.

## RISK INCREASES WITH

- Children and the elderly.
- Contact lens wear.
- Contact with an infected person.
- Newborns of mothers with gonorrhea or chlamydia.
- Sharing eye makeup, towels, pillowcases or glasses.

## EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- Most forms will heal on their own in 1 to 2 weeks with no serious harm.
- Allergic conjunctivitis can be cured if the allergen is removed. However, it is likely to recur.
- Complications are rare, but may include other eye infections or problems of the cornea.

## GENERAL MEASURES

- Sometimes, the infection is treated with self-care. See your health care provider if you have any concerns about the symptoms. An exam of the affected eye will confirm the diagnosis.
- Wash hands often with antiseptic soap, and use paper towels to dry. Don't touch eyes. Gently wipe the discharge from the eye using disposable tissues.
- For infectious conjunctivitis, use warm-water compresses on the eye to reduce discomfort. Cool compresses feel better with allergic conjunctivitis. Apply for 5 to 10 minutes several times a day.
- Do not use eye makeup or wear contact lenses until symptoms are gone.
- Return to work or school once symptoms improve.

## MEDICATIONS

- You may use nonprescription artificial tears in the eyes to help relieve symptoms.
- Antibiotic eye drops or ointments may be prescribed. Antibiotics taken by mouth may be prescribed for more severe cases.
- Steroid eye drops or ointments may be prescribed. Follow instructions carefully, as these products can cause other, more severe eye problems.
- For allergic conjunctivitis, you may use nonprescription anti-allergy eye drops.

## FOLLOW-UP WITH YOUR EYE DOCTOR IF

- Your condition does not improve within several days or worsens at any time.
- Increased swelling or redness of the eyelids.
- Fever occurs.
- Pain increases.
- Vision is affected or eyes become sensitive to light.