

PINKEYE: Conjunctivitis

What is pink eye?

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

What causes pink eye?

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 may be associated with viral illness, such as a common cold.

Treatment for viral causes: 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
- Drops to remove the red are not recommended

Bacterial Conjunctivitis may affect one or both eyes. It often has a thicker, yellowish-green discharge. There may be discomfort, swelling of eyelids and crusted matter may build up preventing eyelids from opening in the morning. May or may not be associated with other upper respiratory infection.

Treatment for bacterial conjunctivitis:

- Antibiotic drops or ointments are indicated
- Moist compresses to remove crusts
- Remove contacts and wear glasses
- Wash hands frequently to prevent spread

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. An allergen causes the release of histamine which causes inflammation and the various symptoms associated with pink eye.

Treatment for allergic causes:

- Limit exposure to allergen if possible
- Cool compresses
- Remove contacts and wear glasses
- Antibiotic drops are not recommended
- Allergy eye drops may be used
- Antihistamine medications such as Zyrtec , Claritin, Benedryl, etc.

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

Treatment for irritant conjunctivitis:

- Removal of the irritant is frequently enough
- Artificial tears
- Limit contact use
- Change contacts or solutions

What else can I do to 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 once treatment is completed.
- Avoid further irritants that may worsen conjunctivitis
- Avoid wearing contact lens while using medications or if your eyes have not cleared. Wear prescription glasses during this period. Follow your doctor's instructions concerning contact lens use.
- Drops to get the red out are not recommended.