

Conjunctivitis

Definition:

Conjunctivitis is an inflammation (redness) of the conjunctiva, the clear tissue that lines the inside surface of your eyelid and outer coating of your eye. Bacteria, viruses, chemicals, or allergies can cause conjunctivitis.

Symptoms:

The most common symptoms include:

- Pink or red color in the white of the eye(s).
- Swelling of the conjunctiva (the thin layer that lines the white part of the eye and the inside of the eyelid) and/or eyelids.
- Increased tear production.
- Feeling like a foreign body is in the eye(s) or an urge to rub the eye(s).
- Itching, irritation, and/or burning.
- Discharge (pus or mucus).
- Crusting of eyelids or lashes, especially in the morning.
- Contact lenses that feel uncomfortable and/or do not stay in place on the eye.

Depending on the cause, other symptoms may occur.

Viral Conjunctivitis

- Can occur with symptoms of a cold, flu, or other respiratory infection.
- Usually begins in one eye and may spread to the other eye within days.
- Discharge from the eye is usually watery rather than thick.

Bacterial Conjunctivitis

- More commonly associated with discharge (pus), which can lead to eyelids sticking together.
- Sometimes occurs with an ear infection.

Allergic Conjunctivitis

- Usually occurs in both eyes.
- Can produce intense itching, tearing, and swelling in the eyes.
- May occur with symptoms of allergies, such as an itchy nose, sneezing, a scratchy throat, or asthma.

Conjunctivitis Caused by Irritants

- Can produce watery eyes and mucus discharge.

Transmission:

- During close contact (touching, shaking hands) with another person. When you touch someone else's hand, you can pick up viruses and bacteria; if you subsequently touch your eye, you may introduce them into your body.
- By touching surfaces contaminated with bacteria or viruses, then touching your eyes before washing your hands.
- By using old eye makeup or sharing makeup that's contaminated with bacteria or viruses.
- By wearing contact lenses that aren't cleaned properly or aren't your own.

Infection can spread from one eye to the other.

Treatment:

Treatment of conjunctivitis depends on the cause.

- Allergic conjunctivitis may improve when allergies are treated. It may go away on its own when you avoid your allergy triggers. Cool compresses may help soothe allergic conjunctivitis. Eye drops that contain antihistamines for the eye or drops containing steroids may be necessary in more severe cases.
- Antibiotic medicines work well to treat conjunctivitis caused by bacteria. These are most often given in the form of eye drops. Drainage from the eye is contagious for 24 to 48 hours after starting antibiotic treatment.
- Viral conjunctivitis will go away on its own without antibiotics. Mild steroid eye drops may help ease discomfort. If you get pink eye from a virus, you're contagious for as long as you have symptoms.
- If your eyes are dry, it may help to use artificial tears in conjunction with any other drops you may be using. Be sure to allow about 10 minutes between using different eye drops. Crustiness of the eyelids can be helped by applying warm compresses. Gently press a clean cloth soaked in warm water to your closed eyes.

N.B: Children who are not able to practice good hygiene or can't avoid close contact with others should stay home until symptoms clear up.

Some recommendations to limit the spread of conjunctivitis:

If you have conjunctivitis, you can help limit its spread to other people by following these steps:

- Wash your hands often with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds. Wash them especially well before and after cleaning or applying eye drops or ointment to your infected eye. If soap and water are unavailable, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol to clean hands.

- Avoid touching or rubbing your eyes. This can worsen the condition or spread it to your other eye.
- With clean hands, wash any discharge from around your eye(s) several times daily using a clean, wet washcloth or fresh cotton ball. Throw away cotton balls after use, wash washcloths with hot water and detergent, then wash your hands with soap and warm water.
- Do not use the same eye drop dispenser/bottle for your infected and non-infected eyes.
- Wash pillowcases, sheets, washcloths, and towels often in hot water and detergent; wash your hands after handling such items.
- Stop wearing contact lenses until your eye doctor says it's okay to start wearing them again.
- Clean eyeglasses, being careful not to contaminate items (like hand towels) that others might share.
- Clean, store, and replace your contact lenses as instructed by your eye doctor.
- Do not share personal items, such as pillows, washcloths, towels, eye drops, eye or face makeup, makeup brushes, contact lenses, contact lens storage cases, or eyeglasses.
- Do not use swimming pools.