

Southern Ophthalmology

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Conjunctivitis

Conjunctivitis is inflammation of the conjunctiva (the surface layer over the white of the eye) causing redness of the eye, swelling of the eyelids and watery or mucous discharge. There are a number of causes of conjunctivitis and the treatment is different.

Allergic Conjunctivitis - This is redness of one or both eyes associated with itching, irritation, grittiness and sometimes mucous discharge. The cause of this is an allergic reaction to dust, smoke, pollen or other allergens and can be associated with hay fever. This condition is usually recurrent and can be seasonal.

Treatment - Simple measures like a cool towel over the eyes can provide comfort. You can also use artificial tears for lubrication. In more severe flare-ups an anti-histamine eye drop can be used. If this does not relieve your symptoms your eye specialist may prescribe an anti-inflammatory eye drop.

Viral Conjunctivitis - This is caused by a viral infection of your conjunctiva. The symptoms include redness, irritation, discharge, tearing and sometimes blurring. It is contagious by direct contact with your tears and you should avoid sharing towels and minimise contact with people around you until your symptoms settle down. Sometimes you may be required to stay away from work to avoid passing the infection to other people.

Treatment - Antibiotics do not work against viruses and the treatment is directed at minimising your symptoms which could take up to a few weeks to settle. Ocular lubricants can be used for mild cases. If more severe, an anti-inflammatory eye drop (often a steroid) can be used. Occasionally, the cornea (clear window at the front of the eye) can be inflamed as well and this can lead to blurring. So if your symptoms do not settle down after a few weeks or if you experience glare or blurring of vision then you should see your eye specialist again.

Bacterial Conjunctivitis - This is less common than the other types of conjunctivitis. The symptoms are similar including redness and sticky discharge.

Treatment - Your eye specialist will treat this with antibiotic eye drops. Anti-inflammatory drops and ocular lubricants can be added for comfort.

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