

CONJUNCTIVITIS

(Pink Eye)

An Overview

Compiled by

Campbell M Gold

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IMPORTANT

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Introduction

Conjunctivitis, also known as Pink Eye, is the medical term that describes an inflammation of the conjunctiva, the thin membrane that covers the white of the eyes (sclera). This membrane produces mucus to coat and lubricate the surface of the eye. Upon close inspection, fine blood vessels can be seen within this membrane.

(Picture right - Conjunctivitis)



When the conjunctiva becomes irritated, the blood vessels enlarge making the eye appear red in colour.

The three most common types of conjunctivitis are:

- 1) Viral conjunctivitis
- 2) Allergic conjunctivitis
- 3) Bacterial conjunctivitis

Each type of conjunctivitis requires different treatments. With the exception of the allergic type, conjunctivitis is typically contagious.

1) Viral Conjunctivitis

Symptoms of viral Conjunctivitis include:

- Watery discharge
- Burning
- Irritation
- Glossy looking redness
- Infection usually begins with one eye, but may easily spread to the other eye
- Often follows upper respiratory tract infection, cold, or sore throat



(Pictures right - Viral Conjunctivitis)

Treatment

Like the common cold, there is no cure for viral conjunctivitis; however, the symptoms can be relieved with cool compresses and artificial tears (found in most chemists). For the worst cases, topical steroid drops may be prescribed to reduce the discomfort from inflammation. Typically, viral conjunctivitis resolves within 3 weeks.

2) Allergic conjunctivitis

Allergic conjunctivitis occurs more frequently among those with allergic conditions. When related to allergies, the symptoms are often seasonal. Allergic conjunctivitis may also be caused by intolerance to substances such as cosmetics, perfume, or drugs.

(Pictures right - Allergic Conjunctivitis)

Symptoms of Allergic Conjunctivitis include:

- Usually affects both eyes
- Itching
- Tearing
- Swollen eyelids
- Watery or stringy discharge



Treatment

Remove the allergen if possible. Cool compresses and artificial tears sometimes relieve discomfort in mild cases. In more severe cases, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory prescription medications may be given. Some individuals with persistent/chronic allergic conjunctivitis may also require topical steroid drops.

3) Bacterial conjunctivitis

Bacterial conjunctivitis is often caused by bacteria such as staphylococcus and streptococcus. The severity of the infection depends on the type of bacteria involved.

(Pictures right - Bacterial Conjunctivitis)

Symptoms of Bacterial Conjunctivitis include:

- Purulent (Pussy) discharge
- Stringy discharge that may cause the lids to stick together, especially after sleeping
- Lids often stick together overnight
- Swelling of the conjunctiva
- Meaty Redness
- Tearing
- Irritation, pain and/or a gritty feeling
- Usually affects only one eye, often easily spreads to the other eye



Diagnosis

Conjunctivitis is diagnosed during a routine eye exam using a slit lamp microscope. In some cases, cultures are taken to determine the type of bacteria causing the infection.

Treatment

Conjunctivitis typically requires medical attention. However, the appropriate treatment depends on the cause of the problem.

(Picture right - Conjunctivitis)

For **allergic conjunctivitis**, cool compresses and artificial tears sometimes relieve discomfort in mild cases. In more severe cases, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications and antihistamines may be required. Some individuals with persistent allergic conjunctivitis may also require topical steroid drops.



Bacterial conjunctivitis is usually treated with antibiotic eye drops or ointments that cover a broad spectrum of bacteria.

Like the common cold, there is no cure for **viral conjunctivitis**; however, the symptoms can be relieved with cool compresses and artificial tears (found in most chemists). For the worst cases, topical steroid drops may be required to reduce the discomfort from inflammation. Viral conjunctivitis usually resolves within 3 weeks.

To Avoid Spreading Infection

(Picture right - Conjunctivitis is a readily transmitted condition)



- Disinfect surfaces such as doorknobs and counters with diluted bleach solution

- Don't swim (some bacteria can be spread in the water)
- Avoid touching the face
- Wash hands frequently
- Don't share towels or washcloths
- Do not reuse handkerchiefs (using a tissue is best)
- Avoid shaking hands

End

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