

Pink Eye – Conjunctivitis

Definition, Symptoms and Causes

Pink eye is the common name given to inflammation of the conjunctiva of the eye. It is otherwise called conjunctivitis.

The conjunctiva is the transparent membrane that lines the eyelids and covers the whites of the eyes. Very small, superficial blood vessels on the conjunctiva dilate due to inflammation and cause the tissue to become reddened, swollen and to secrete fluid. The entire conjunctiva is usually involved. Symptoms often include:

1. Watery or thick discharge
2. Sensitivity of light
3. A burning or itching of the eyes
4. A sandy or gravelly feeling in the eyes
5. Eyelids are often stuck together by crusts in the morning
6. Vision is disturbed because of mucous or excessive tearing
7. It may start in one eye and often spread to the other eye

The most common causes of conjunctivitis include:

1. Infection (viruses – very common, and bacteria - uncommon)
2. Irritation caused by chemicals, fumes, dust, hair or other debris
3. Allergies (seasonal, cats, dogs, reactions to facial products or eye drops)
4. Injuries (excessive contact lens wear)
5. Oral-genital contact with someone who might be infected with an STD such as Chlamydia, Gonorrhea or Herpes Simplex

Self-care Suggestions

1. Wash hands frequently to limit the spread to yourself and others
2. Do not share towels or washcloths with anyone
3. Avoid rubbing your eyes and wash hands after touching your eyes
4. Do not use contacts until all symptoms have cleared (usually 7 – 10 days)
5. Cool compresses may be used to reduce itching and swelling
6. Warm compresses help to remove discharge and crusting.
7. Cool or warm compresses may be used to reduce any general discomfort
8. Artificial tears with or without “redness relievers” and antihistamines may reduce redness, itching and but should only be used a few days following package insert.

Seek Medical Care if any of these occur:

1. Pain is increasing
2. Vision is worsening
3. Swelling or light sensitivity is increasing
4. There is blistering and/or a rash on the eyelids
5. Mucous is thickened like pus
6. The condition is not improving after 1 week