

Patient Information – Conjunctivitis

Department of Ophthalmology

What is conjunctivitis?

Conjunctivitis is a common condition that causes redness and inflammation of the thin layer of tissue that covers the front of the eye (the conjunctiva). It may be caused by viruses, bacteria or an allergy. The vast majority of cases are caused by viruses, like the common cold.

Symptoms of conjunctivitis include itchiness and watering of the eyes, and sometimes a sticky coating on the eyelashes (if it's caused by an allergy).

Is conjunctivitis serious?

It is not serious but it is **very contagious** (easily spread). To help prevent passing the condition on to other people you must use a separate flannel, towel and soap from others.

Always wash your hands before and after touching your eyes and after putting in drops. If you only have the infection in one eye, **do not touch** the other as this may cause the infection to spread to the healthy eye.

How to relieve the symptoms of conjunctivitis:

- If your eyes are sticky, bathe them with cool water that has been boiled.
- If you wear contact lenses, take them out until all the signs and symptoms of the conjunctivitis have gone.
- Do not rub your eyes, even though your eyes may be itchy. Rubbing them can make your symptoms worse.
- Wetting a flannel with cool water and holding it over your eyes will help ease your symptoms.

Helpful Tips:

- **Wash your hands regularly** - This is particularly important after you have touched your infected eyes and will stop the infection spreading to other people.
- If anyone else is putting in drops for you, remind them that they must **wash their hands** before and after instillation.
- **Do not share** your drops with anyone else.
- While you have the infection, do not go swimming, use eye make or use contact lenses.

How long does it take for conjunctivitis to resolve?

Conjunctivitis often doesn't require treatment as the symptoms usually clear up within a couple of weeks. If treatment is necessary, the type of treatment will depend on the cause. In severe cases, antibiotic eye drops can be used to clear the infection.

See your GP immediately if you develop:

- Eye pain
- Sensitivity to light (photophobia)
- Disturbed vision
- Intense redness in one or both of your eyes

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