

Conjunctivitis

What is conjunctivitis?

Conjunctivitis is irritation of the thin tissue which covers the white of the eye. It is commonly caused by infection with bacteria or viruses, or by an allergy. It does not normally affect your sight.

Symptoms

- The eye(s) feels gritty, as if there is something in it.
- The 'white' of the eye(s) looks pink, or red.
- The eye(s) may water.
- There may be a sticky discharge from your eye(s) and in the morning your eyelids may be stuck together with this discharge.
- This condition may be in one or both eyes.

Advice on how to make your eyes more comfortable

It is important that the eyes are kept clean. The best way to do this is to use boiled water that has been cooled and cotton pad/ clean tissue to wipe the closed eye lids. Ensure that the used pad/ tissue is safely disposed of.

Do not use the same pad/ tissue more than once, as infection may be reintroduced. The nurse/ optometrist can instruct you on how to clean your eyes.

You may or may not be given treatment for the conjunctivitis, as often the condition will resolve without treatment. However, in some cases treatment may be in the form of drops, ointment or both, depending on the cause of the conjunctivitis. Viral infections generally do not require antibiotics.

If the light troubles your eyes, then dark glasses can be worn to keep you more comfortable.

Advice on how to control the infection

Ensure you apply the drops and ointment correctly and as frequently as instructed.

It is important that the conjunctivitis does not spread to other members of your household. To prevent this, it is important that you:

- Wash your hands before and after putting in the drops or ointment
- Use separate towels and face flannels
- Keep pillow cases separate

- Use tissues instead of handkerchiefs when wiping eyes and discard after one use
- Never wear an eye pad over the infected eye as this will cause the infection to become worse.

It is advisable to keep young children away from school or playgroups if the eyes are sticky.

It is not advisable to go swimming with conjunctivitis.

Remove contact lenses until the condition has fully resolved. Replace your lenses and case or have them professionally cleaned before wearing them again.

Allergic conjunctivitis

The white of the eye and sometimes the eye lids swell, often quite dramatically, if there is an allergic conjunctivitis/ reaction.

Allergic reactions often occur in response to pollens, make-up, skin care products, animal hairs, and also plants. This type of conjunctivitis does not produce sticky discharge, though watering and itching may occur. Allergic conjunctivitis is not infectious and will often resolve itself when there is no further contact with the source of the allergy.

Cold compresses are soothing and help to reduce the swelling. If the swelling does not respond to this, an over the counter oral (tablet) anti-histamine may be advised, or an anti-histamine drop may be recommended or prescribed.

The Trust cannot accept any responsibility for the accuracy of the information given if the leaflet is not used by Royal Devon staff undertaking procedures at the Royal Devon hospitals.

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