

Conjunctivitis

Eye Clinic

Tel: 01271 322467

Other formats

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What is conjunctivitis?

Conjunctivitis is inflammation of the thin tissue that covers the white of the eye.

What causes conjunctivitis?

It is commonly caused by infection with bacteria or viruses.

Viral conjunctivitis is often associated with colds, sore throats and other viral illnesses.

Allergic conjunctivitis is most commonly seen in the spring and summer, associated with hay fever. Allergies are typically caused by pollens, make up and skin care products, animal hair and plants.

Conjunctivitis does not normally affect your sight.

What are the symptoms?

- The conjunctiva, covering the white of your eye, may appear pink or red
- Itching
- A watery discharge

- There may be a sticky discharge from the eye, in the morning your eyelids may be stuck together
- One or both eyes may be affected
- Your eye lids may be swollen
- A feeling of something in the eye

How is it treated?

This will depend on the cause of your conjunctivitis.

- Bacterial conjunctivitis

Treatment may be in the form of anti-biotic drops or ointment

- Viral conjunctivitis

Unfortunately there are no drops or ointments to treat viral conjunctivitis. It will usually resolve on its own in two to three weeks. Occasionally, anti-biotic drops may be prescribed to treat secondary bacterial infections.

- Allergic conjunctivitis

Often allergic conjunctivitis will resolve on its own when there is no further contact with the source of the allergy.

Cold compresses are soothing and may help reduce the swelling resulting from the allergic response.

Anti-histamine drops or tablets may be prescribed.

How to control infection

It is important that viral or bacterial conjunctivitis does not spread to members of your family and friends.

Allergic conjunctivitis is not infectious.

To prevent the spread of infection it is important that you:

- Wash your hands before and after using your drops or ointment

- Use separate towels and face flannels
- Use paper tissues instead of cloth handkerchiefs when wiping your eyes and discard after use
- Do not wear an eyepad over the eye, as this will cause the infection to become worse

It is not advisable to go swimming with conjunctivitis.

Always remove contact lenses until your conjunctivitis has resolved. Replace your lenses and case, or seek advice from your contact lens practitioner.

How long does conjunctivitis last?

Bacterial conjunctivitis when treated may resolve in 10-14 days

Viral conjunctivitis will resolve on its own usually within three weeks; however, it may take longer in some cases.

Further information

If you have any questions or concerns please ask any member of the medical or nursing team or contact the Eye Clinic, Monday to Thursday 9am to 5pm, Friday 9am to 1pm.

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PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern call 01271 314090 or email rduh.pals-northern@nhs.net. You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple.

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