

CONJUNCTIVITIS

What is conjunctivitis?

Conjunctivitis is an inflammation of the conjunctiva, a thin, transparent layer covering the surface of the inner eyelid and a portion of the front of the eye. This condition appears in many forms and affects people of all ages.

What causes conjunctivitis?

The three main types of conjunctivitis are infectious, allergic and chemical. The infectious form, commonly known as “pink eye” is caused by a contagious virus or bacteria. Your body’s allergies to pollen, cosmetics, animals or fabrics often bring on allergic conjunctivitis. And, irritants like air pollution, noxious fumes and chlorine in swimming pools may produce the chemical form.

What are the signs/symptoms of conjunctivitis?

Common signs/symptoms of conjunctivitis are red eyes, inflamed inner lids, watery eyes, blurred vision and a sandy or scratchy feeling in the eyes. With the infectious form, there may be a puslike or watery discharge around the eyelids.

Since infectious conjunctivitis is contagious, what measures can be taken to prevent spreading this condition?

To avoid giving infectious conjunctivitis to others, keep your hands away from your eyes; thoroughly wash your hands before and after applying eye medication; do not share towels, washcloths, cosmetics or eyedrops with others and seek treatment promptly. Small children, who may forget these precautions, should be kept away from school, camp and the swimming pool until the condition is cured.

Will conjunctivitis harm my eyes?

Certain forms of conjunctivitis can develop into a serious condition that may harm your vision. Therefore, it’s important to have your condition diagnosed and properly treated quickly.

How is infectious conjunctivitis treated?

Infectious conjunctivitis, caused by bacteria, is usually treated with antibiotic eye drops and/or ointment. Other infectious forms, caused by viruses, can’t be treated with antibiotics. They are fought off by your body’s immune system. But, some antibiotics may be prescribed to prevent secondary bacterial infections from developing.

How are the allergic and chemical forms of conjunctivitis treated?

The ideal treatment for both forms is to remove the cause of the allergy or irritation. For instance, avoid contact with any animal if it causes an allergic reaction. Wear swimming goggles if chlorinated water irritates your eyes. In cases where these measures won’t work, other types of prescription and over-the-counter eye drops are available to help relieve the discomfort.