

Conjunctivitis - Advice for Students

The thin surface membrane of your eye is known as the conjunctiva. It forms a thin transparent layer over the white of the eye and under your eyelids. Conjunctivitis means inflammation of the conjunctiva, also known as red or pink eye. It is a simple and common condition which can affect one or both eyes. Viral conjunctivitis is the most common cause and bacterial the second, both are infectious.

Causes

Infection Viral/bacterial

Allergies

Irritation

Signs & Symptoms

The whites of the eye can look inflamed, swollen and red

The eye may feel itchy, gritty or burning

They may be discharge from eye - sticky eyes

Watery eye / discomfort in eye

Eyelids may become swollen and get stuck together, especially in the mornings.

Vision may be slightly blurred due to sticky discharge smearing over the surface of the eye but this should clear on blinking or wiping the eye

Treatment

Bath the eyes: Boil water then let it cool. Using a clean cotton wool pad, one for each eye, gently wipe your eyelashes to clean off any crusts. You can also apply a warm compress over the eye

Use lubricant drops / artificial tears or cleansing eye drops from the chemist. These may help reduce discomfort and grittiness

If you have pus eye discharge, the cause of conjunctivitis may be bacterial. You can buy a suitable antibacterial treatment (eye drops or ointment) such as chloramphenicol, at a pharmacy without a prescription. Please follow the 'instructions for use' carefully.

If not infectious but caused by allergy - antihistamine eye drops can be bought at a pharmacy.
<https://patient.info/eye-care/eye-problems/allergic-conjunctivitis>

Simple painkillers such as paracetamol or ibuprofen tablets (if able to take) are available over the counter at a pharmacy

Steroid eye drops are occasionally used in severe cases.

No treatment – most conjunctivitis infections clear up on their own within a few days to a few weeks. Viral infections do not respond to antibiotics and the infection may last for two to three weeks before your natural immunity is able to build up enough to clear the virus

Advice

Avoid rubbing the eye

Avoid wearing contact lenses until your symptoms have completely cleared. You may be recommended to throw out soft contact lenses you've already worn and disinfect hard lenses

Always ensure you use good hand hygiene prior to handling contact lenses

Conjunctivitis is contagious and spreads very easily by water droplets (coughing, sneezing) or contact with tissues, flannels, towels, pillowcases. For that reason, it's important to wash your hands frequently and dispose of tissues after use to prevent the condition from spreading to other family members or work colleagues.

Seek medical advice if your symptoms persist or you develop noticeable eye pain or concerning blurred vision or if you see any blisters or spots on your eyes

Avoid irritating your eye by rubbing it after touching dishwasher tablets, clothes washing powder/capsules, other cleaning products and gardening products

Further Support

The College Nurse and College Doctor offer advice for eye complaints. Please find their contact details on the [SPC Website](#).

Specsavers on 33, Queen Street run a Minor Eye Condition Service (MECS) usually free on the NHS. Drop in or call them on 01865 255710 to make an appointment
<https://primaryeyecare.co.uk/find-a-practice/>

For eye emergencies, the Eye Hospital at the John Radcliffe Hospital is open 7 days a week and can be contacted on

Tel: 01865 234567 Option 1 followed by Option 1

<https://www.ouh.nhs.uk/eye-hospital/departments/emergencies/>

Out of hours please call 111 or go online <https://111.nhs.uk/>

Further Reading

<https://www.moorfields.nhs.uk/sites/default/files/Infective%20Conjunctivitis.pdf>

<https://patient.info/eye-care/eye-problems/infective-conjunctivitis>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/conjunctivitis/>