

Conjunctivitis (Pinkeye)

Conjunctivitis

Conjunctivitis is an inflammation of the conjunctiva, the mucus membrane that lines the inside of the eyelid and touches the white part of the eye.

Conjunctivitis can occur in just one or both eyes. It can be either infectious or noninfectious.

Infectious Conjunctivitis

Infectious conjunctivitis develops from either a virus or bacteria. This type is contagious (spreads easily) and is often called “pinkeye.” People can catch conjunctivitis by:

- coming in contact with tears or the discharge from the eye of an infected person and then touching their own eyes
- coming in contact with nasal secretions spread by an infected person coughing or sneezing
- sharing objects with an infected person, such as towels, cosmetics or eye drops.

Symptoms of infectious conjunctivitis include:

- red, irritated, burning eyes
- a white or yellow discharge that may cause the eyelids to stick shut in the morning.

Anyone can get this form of conjunctivitis. It is most common among preschoolers and elementary school children because of crowded conditions and lack of hygiene.

Infectious conjunctivitis caused by bacteria can be treated with antibiotics. Viral conjunctivitis must run its course, normally 1 to 6 weeks.

Your eye care provider may suggest some ways to help relieve symptoms, such as:

- putting a cold, moist cloth over your eye(s) 3 or 4 times a day
- using over-the-counter products; ask what products might work best for your situation.

If you have infectious conjunctivitis, you can help prevent its spread by:

- washing your hands before using any eye medicines and after touching your eyes
- not touching other people’s eyes
- not sharing any objects that touch your eyes
- covering your mouth when coughing or sneezing.

Noninfectious Conjunctivitis

Conjunctivitis that is not contagious is most commonly caused by allergies or chemical irritants. Contact lenses can also cause this eye inflammation.

- **Allergic conjunctivitis**
a reaction to pollen, pet dander, dust and other materials
- **Chemical conjunctivitis**
a reaction to air pollution, fumes, chlorine in swimming pools, cosmetics and other chemicals
- **Conjunctivitis from contact lens use**
often a reaction to contact lens solutions.

Symptoms for these types of noninfectious conjunctivitis include red, watery or itchy eyes. If you have allergic conjunctivitis, you may also have an itchy nose or scratchy throat.

To treat noninfectious conjunctivitis, your eye care provider may suggest these or other steps to relieve symptoms:

- putting a cold, moist cloth over your eye(s) 3 or 4 times a day
- using prescribed or over-the-counter products; ask what prescription or over-the-counter products might work best for your situation
- avoiding the triggers of allergic, chemical or contact lens conjunctivitis if possible. Your eye care provider may recommend that you not wear contact lenses while you have conjunctivitis.

**Information adapted
in part from the
National Eye Institute.**