



Wasatch View Eye Care

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Conjunctivitis

Overview

Conjunctivitis (often called “pink eye”) is an inflammation of the conjunctiva (the mucus membrane that covers the white colored part of the eye). Common signs and symptoms include redness, light sensitivity, foreign body sensation, itchiness and burning. It may be caused by numerous factors from viral or bacterial infections, allergies, dry eye syndrome, improper contact lens wear or chemicals in the eye. Treatment ranges from artificial tears, cold compresses, removing the cause, medications and/or changing contact lens wearing habits.



Signs and Symptoms

Typical signs include ocular redness from dilated blood vessels, swelling, mucopurulent discharge, excessive tearing and raised bumps on the eye called papillae or follicles. Symptoms of conjunctivitis are foreign body sensation, dryness, itchiness, burning, light sensitivity and decreased vision.

Causes

There are numerous causes of conjunctivitis. Bacteria are normally present on the conjunctiva, however, an overgrowth or a specific pathogen can cause an infection. A few of the more common types of bacteria that can cause conjunctivitis include *Streptococcus pneumoniae*, *Haemophilus influenzae*, *Moraxella catarrhalis* & *Staphylococcus aureus*.

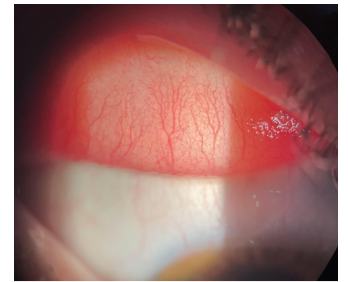
Viruses frequently cause conjunctivitis and will usually also affect the cornea. Some viruses that cause conjunctivitis include Herpes Simplex (cold sores), Varicella-Zoster (chicken-pox), and the adenovirus (cold virus). The adenovirus causes a very contagious version of conjunctivitis called epidemic keratoconjunctivitis or (EKC) and requires very good hygiene to avoid spreading the virus.

The conjunctiva is an exposed mucus membrane and is an easy and common location for allergens to cause an allergic reaction. Allergens include pollen, pet dander or hypersensitivity reactions to chemicals or medications. Smoke and air pollution can also be irritating to the conjunctiva. The classic symptom of an ocular allergy is itching in both eyes. Inadequate tear secretion from dry

eye frequently causes conjunctivitis. Contact lenses are a very common source of conjunctivitis, especially when they are not taken care of properly or replaced more frequently.

Testing & Evaluation

Conjunctivitis is assessed with a biomicroscope by your eye doctor. They will look for dilated blood vessels, tear film stability, corneal involvement and material (puss, mucus, foreign body) in the eye. It is important for your eye doctor to look at the portion of the eyelid that touches the eye itself called the palpebral conjunctiva. This may require the inverting of the upper eyelid.



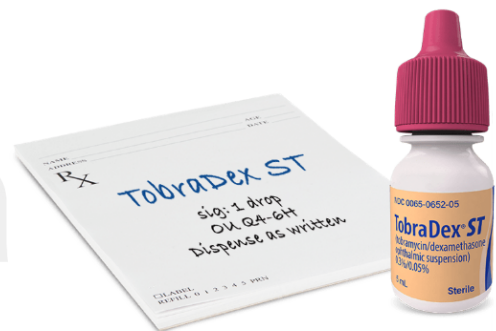
Inverted eyelid

Management

Management of conjunctivitis is dependent on the cause. Common treatments include the use of a cold compress and preservative free artificial tears. Bacterial infections may require a topical antibiotic, but they are usually self-limiting. Some viral infections are helped by the use of antiviral medications and topical steroids. However, the use of topical steroids should be assessed by your eye doctor carefully to avoid exacerbation of the condition by some viruses.

Antihistamines and mast cell stabilizers work wonderfully with ocular allergies and can even be purchased over the counter. A popular and effective over-the-counter eye drop for ocular allergies is Pataday and is used two times a day (use prior and after to contact lens wear). Changing contact wearing habits, hygiene and solutions can relieve conjunctivitis from contact lens wear. Common contact lens wearing habits that lead to conjunctivitis are sleeping in your contacts, overwearing them beyond the recommended replacement time and not washing your hands prior to handling contact lenses.

A common prescription written for conjunctivitis by eye doctors is Tobradex. It is an antibiotic and anti-inflammatory combination medicated eye drop. The combination drop can treat a lot of the different types of conjunctivitis, but because of potential serious side effects it should be used judiciously in coordination with your prescriber.



Best for short term use

Drops that reduce redness are good for short term use, but are not a good option for long-term use (i.e. Visine, Clear Eyes or Lumify). These drops should not be used for more than three days and after that your eyes should be evaluated by an eye doctor. With prolonged use they may cause a rebound reaction when they are stopped.

Websites

All About Vision: <https://www.allaboutvision.com/conditions/conjunctivitis.htm>

American Optometric Association:

<https://www.aoa.org/healthy-eyes/eye-and-vision-conditions/conjunctivitis?sso=y>

National Eye Institute:

<https://www.nei.nih.gov/learn-about-eye-health/eye-conditions-and-diseases/pink-eye>

