

Conjunctivitis

What is conjunctivitis?

Conjunctivitis is irritation of the thin tissue which covers the white of the eye. It is commonly caused by infection with bacteria or viruses, or by an allergy. It does not normally affect your sight.

Symptoms

- The eye feels gritty, as if there is something in it.
- The 'white' of the eye looks pink, or red.
- The eye may water.
- There may be a discharge from your eye and in the morning your eyelids may be stuck together with this discharge.
- This condition may be in one or both eyes.

Advice on how to make your eyes more comfortable

It is important that the eyes are kept clean. The best way to do this is to use boiled water that has been cooled and clean tissue. Ensure that the used tissue is safely disposed of.

Do not use the same piece of tissue more than once as infection may be reintroduced. The nurse can instruct you on how to clean your eyes.

If the light troubles your eyes, then dark glasses can be worn to keep you more comfortable.

Treatment may be in the form of drops or ointment or both, according to the cause of the conjunctivitis. Viral infections generally do not require antibiotics.

Advice on how to control the infection

Ensure you apply the drops and ointment correctly and as frequently as instructed.

It is important that the conjunctivitis does not spread to other members of your family. To prevent this it is important that you:

- wash your hands before and after putting in the drops or ointment;
- use separate towels and face flannels;
- keep pillow cases separate;
- use tissues instead of handkerchiefs when wiping eyes and discard after one use;
- never wear an eye pad over the infected eye as this will cause the infection to become worse.

It is advisable to keep young children away from school or playgroups if the eyes are sticky.

It is not advisable to go swimming with conjunctivitis.

Remove contact lenses until the condition has resolved. Replace your lenses and case or have them professionally cleaned.

Allergic conjunctivitis

The white of the eye and sometimes the lids swell, often quite dramatically, if there is an allergic reaction.

Common allergies are in response to pollens, make-up and skin care products, animal hairs, and also plants. This type of conjunctivitis does

not produce discharge, though watering and itching occur. It is not infectious.

It will often resolve itself when there is no further contact with the source of the allergy.

Cold compresses are soothing and help to reduce the swelling. If the swelling does not respond to this, anti-histamine drops or medicine may be prescribed by your GP or over the counter from the chemist.

The Trust cannot accept any responsibility for the accuracy of the information given if the leaflet is not used by RD&E staff undertaking procedures at the RD&E hospitals.

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