American Academy of Ophthalmology
The Eye M.D. Association
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Conjunctivitis (Pink Eye)

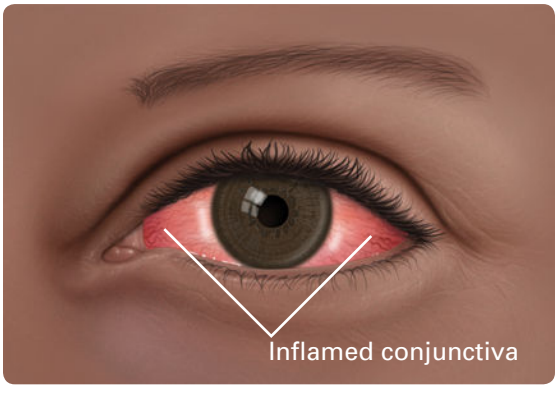
What is conjunctivitis (pink eye)?

Conjunctivitis is often called "pink eye." It happens when the conjunctiva is irritated by an infection or allergies. Your eyes are red and swollen (inflamed), and sometimes they have a sticky discharge. You can have conjunctivitis in one or both eyes. Some types of pink eye are very contagious (easily spread from person to person).

Eye Words to Know

Conjunctiva: Clear tissue covering the white part of your eye and the inside of your eyelids.

Cornea: Clear, dome-shaped window of the front of your eye. It focuses light into your eye.



There are three types of conjunctivitis.

Viral conjunctivitis is the most common type of pink eye. It is caused by the same virus that causes the common cold. This conjunctivitis is very contagious and often spreads through schools and other crowded places. It usually causes burning, red eyes with a watery discharge.

Bacterial conjunctivitis is also very contagious. An infection from bacteria causes this form of pink eye. With bacterial conjunctivitis, you have sore, red eyes with a lot of sticky pus.

Allergic conjunctivitis is a type of pink eye that comes from an allergic reaction to something. It is not contagious. Allergic pink eye makes your eyes very itchy, red and watery.

What are the symptoms of conjunctivitis?

Your pink eye symptoms may include:

- the feeling that something is in your eye, or a gritty sensation in your eye
- red eyes
- burning eyes
- itchy eyes
- painful eyes (this is usually with the bacterial form)
- watery eyes
- puffy eyelids
- blurry or hazy vision

- being extra sensitive to light
- lots of mucus, pus, or thick yellow discharge from your eye. There can be so much that your eyelashes stick together (usually with bacterial conjunctivitis).

What causes conjunctivitis?

Conjunctivitis is most commonly caused by a viral infection. The same virus gives you the runny nose and sore throat of the common cold.

Bacterial infections cause conjunctivitis that produces lots of sticky pus in the eye. Some bacterial infections, however, may cause little or no discharge. Sometimes the bacteria that cause pink eye are the same that cause strep throat. Both bacterial and viral conjunctivitis are easily spread from person to person.

Sometimes having an allergic reaction to pollen or animals can cause conjunctivitis. So can irritation from cigarette smoke, car fumes, pool chlorine or other toxic substances. The main symptom of allergic pink eye is itchy eyes. Other symptoms include red, burning and tearing eyes and puffy eyelids. Allergic conjunctivitis is not contagious.

How is conjunctivitis treated?

Treating your pink eye usually depends on the type of conjunctivitis you have.

If your conjunctivitis is caused by a viral infection, there are no specific treatments. Your body fights the virus on its own. Placing a cool, wet washcloth on your eyes can help make them feel more comfortable.

If your pink eye is caused by a bacterial infection, your ophthalmologist may prescribe antibiotic eye drops. Antibiotics do not treat an infection caused by a virus or by allergy.

If your conjunctivitis is due to allergies, you might be told to use certain eye drops to help with the itchiness and puffiness.

Conjunctivitis usually goes away on its own within 1–2 weeks. If your symptoms last longer than that, you should see your ophthalmologist. He or she can make sure you don't have a more serious eye problem.

Stop pink eye from spreading

Some conjunctivitis can spread from person to person. Follow these tips so you will not infect other people or re-infect yourself.

- Use a clean towel or tissue each time you wipe your face and eyes.
- Wash your hands very often. Always wash them before and after you eat, when you go to the bathroom, or after you sneeze or cough.
- Try not to touch your eyes. If you do, wash your hands right away.
- Bacteria can live in makeup. This can cause pink eye and even a dangerous infection of the cornea. Do not use eye makeup while your eyes are infected. Replace your makeup if you have an eye infection. And, never share eye makeup with others.
- Make sure to clean your contact lenses exactly as your ophthalmologist recommends.

Summary

Conjunctivitis (often called "pink eye") is when the membrane inside your eyelid gets red, swollen and sticky. It can be very contagious when caused by a virus or bacteria. Sometimes pink eye is due to an allergic reaction.

In some cases, an antibiotic eye drop may be prescribed for bacterial conjunctivitis. For pink eye caused by allergies, some eye drops can help with itchy and puffy eyes. Viral pink eye symptoms may be relieved with cool, wet compresses on the eyes.

Conjunctivitis usually goes away on its own within 1–2 weeks.

To learn more about conjunctivitis, scan this code with your smartphone or visit **http://sn.im/_conjunctivitis**.

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