

Columbus Ophthalmology Associates
CONJUNCTIVITIS

What is conjunctivitis?

Conjunctivitis is an infection of the mucous lining of the eye called the conjunctiva. It is often referred to as “pink eye.” The delicate conjunctiva has very fine blood vessels that when infected become swollen, red and irritated.

What causes conjunctivitis?

There are many causes of infection. Both viruses and bacteria create a red eye that is associated with a considerable amount of drainage. In some cases, these infections can be accompanied by a sore throat and a runny nose. This condition can last from 1-2 weeks and is very contagious. Therefore, hand washing is essential after contact with the eye. Likewise, infected individuals should use their own handkerchief and towels. If someone is working in an environment where they are in close contact with other people or prepare food for others, they may have to stay off work for a few days until the infection has cleared. This is especially important for teachers, nurses, health care workers and people in the food service industry.

Signs and symptoms

- Stringy discharge that may cause the lids to stick together, especially after sleeping
- Swelling of the conjunctiva
- Redness
- Tearing
- Irritation and/or a gritty feeling
- Usually affects only one eye, but may spread easily to the other eye

What treatment is available?

There are a variety of antibiotic, antiviral and anti-inflammatory medications used in the treatment of conjunctivitis. An examination in the office, in most cases, determines the nature of the disorder. In some circumstances, a culture may need to be obtained to help identify the cause. The most common treatment is topical drops in the eye. Proper care of the bottle should be taken so that it does not become contaminated. Cleaning the tip with alcohol can prevent infection. Any eye makeup, contact lens solution and, in some cases, the contact lenses themselves, must be discarded in order to prevent re-infection.

To avoid spreading the infection, take these simple steps

- Disinfect surfaces such as doorknobs and counters with diluted bleach solution
- Do not swim
- Avoid touching the face
- Wash hands frequently
- Do not share towels or washcloths
- Do not reuse handkerchiefs
- Avoid shaking hands

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