

*Columbus Ophthalmology Associates*  
**SEASONAL OCULAR ALLERGIES**

**What are eye allergies?**

Allergies affect about 20% of the world's population. Allergies can affect the eye in about one third of this group. An eye allergy can be the eye's overreaction to a substance that it thinks will do harm. The most common symptoms of this disease are itching, accompanied by redness and watering of the eyes. Sometimes a thin, mucous discharge is present.

**What causes eye allergies?**

Seasonal ocular allergies are due to a response on the surface of the eye to an antigen (pollen, dust, and mold). A series of events causes the release of histamines. Histamine is the chemical responsible for the symptoms that patients may experience with seasonal ocular allergies.

**What treatment is available?**

Therapy for allergic conjunctivitis has evolved a great deal in the past several years. Initially, patients were treated by decongestants or vasoconstrictors, as well as antihistamines, or a combination of products. In severe cases topical steroids have been used to decrease the inflammation on the eye.

A new agent, known as **non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)**, inhibits the synthesis of chemicals known as prostaglandins. These medications are not steroids, but are an alternative, and when administered by mouth can help relieve pain and inflammation in the joints. Ibuprofen is a commonly used anti-inflammatory drug. These drugs are now available in drops and are used in combination with, or in place of, steroids to treat and relieve ocular itching due to seasonal allergies.

**Mast cell stabilizers** are another medication used by your eye care specialist to reduce ocular allergy symptoms and recurrence. These drugs are often used as maintenance therapy and need to be taken regularly for them to be most effective.

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