

Conjunctivitis

What is conjunctivitis?

Conjunctivitis or "pink eye" is an inflammation of the conjunctiva, or outer lining of the eyeball. Healthy conjunctiva is white. When the conjunctiva is inflamed, the eyes look pink or red. Often, there is discharge, which can be watery, or thick and green. Other symptoms may include burning, itching, irritation, or crusting of the eyelashes.

What causes conjunctivitis?

There are many causes of conjunctivitis. Infectious conjunctivitis is caused by bacteria or viruses. Conjunctivitis can also be caused by allergies or contact with chemicals. The eye may look similar to you no matter what is causing the conjunctivitis. An eye exam can help determine what is the cause of the "pink eye", and also make sure that the eye is not red for another reason (see below, "Does a pink eye always mean infection?").

Is conjunctivitis contagious?

Conjunctivitis caused by bacteria or viruses is contagious [See Figure 1]



Fig. 1: Bacterial Conjunctivitis.

How is conjunctivitis treated?

As stated above, there are several different causes of conjunctivitis, and treatment depends on the cause. If the conjunctivitis is caused by bacteria, antibiotic drops or ointment may be needed. It



is important to use any prescription medication for the full number of days prescribed in order to prevent recurrence and reduce antibiotic resistance. Viral conjunctivitis does not respond to antibiotics. [Allergic conjunctivitis](#) is treated with allergy drops.

Are there any permanent effects on vision from conjunctivitis?

Most infections clear without causing any problems. However, some serious infections and certain types of viral eye infections, such as herpes, can cause vision problems if not treated appropriately.

How can I prevent conjunctivitis?

Hand washing is the best way to avoid getting conjunctivitis. Also, do not touch your eyes or face unless you have just washed your hands. If you wear contact lenses, wash your hands before putting in and taking out your lenses. Regularly clean and dispose of your lenses, according to manufacturer guidelines. Always store your lenses in commercially prepared solutions. Never swim in a lake or hot tub with your lenses on. If you have been diagnosed with conjunctivitis, do NOT wear your lenses until you have recovered, and then, start with a fresh pair of lenses.

Does a pink eye always mean infection?

No. A pink or red eye may be a sign of another eye problem such as allergy, foreign body, contact lens reaction, inflammation inside the eye, or glaucoma.

My baby has tearing as well as discharge. Is this conjunctivitis?

These could be symptoms of infectious conjunctivitis but may also be caused by a blocked tear duct, or glaucoma.

More technical information about neonatal conjunctivitis can be found on the [EyeWiki Site](#).

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