

Conjunctivitis Advice

What is conjunctivitis?

The conjunctiva is the thin 'skin' that covers the white part of the eyes and the inside of the eyelids. Conjunctivitis is an inflammation of this part of the eye, and is usually caused by:

- An infection (bacteria or viruses, usually flu or cold viruses) - **infective conjunctivitis.**
- An allergy - **allergic conjunctivitis.**

What are the symptoms of infective conjunctivitis?

- One eye may be infected, but it usually spreads to both eyes
- The whites of the eyes look inflamed, and red or pink.
- It feels gritty and may water more than usual.
- The eyelids may become swollen, and are often stuck together with gluey material (discharge) after a sleep
- Vision is not normally affected. You may get some blurring of vision due to discharge at the front of the eye. However, this clears with blinking.
- Most cases of conjunctivitis clear in 7 – 10 days without any treatment

What are the treatment options for infective conjunctivitis?

- ❖ **Simple painkillers** such as paracetamol or ibuprofen tablets (provided you have no medical reason which prevents you from using non-steroidal painkillers), are available over the counter at a chemist and can ease the discomfort and flu-like symptoms.

- ❖ **Lubricant eye drops, gel or ointment**– these may help reduce discomfort and grittiness, but will not reduce the duration of the illness
- ❖ **Antibiotic eye drops or ointment**– viral infections do not respond to antibiotics and the infection may last for two to three weeks before your natural immunity is able to build up enough to clear the virus. Antibiotic drops or ointment may be helpful in conjunctivitis caused by **bacteria**.

Things you should do	Things you should not do
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wash your hands with soap regularly, especially after touching your eyes. • Regularly clean any sticky discharge or secretions from your eyelids with cotton wool soaked in boiled and cooled water. • Place cool compresses (such as a flannel soaked in cold water) on the affected eyes to ease symptoms. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not share towels, pillows or utensils and keep a separate towel, flannel and soap for yourself. • Do not allow anyone else to use any ointment/ drops you are using. • Do not wear any contact lens in the affected eye(s) until all symptoms and signs of infection have completely gone and any treatment has been completed for 24 hours.

Can my child go to school/nursery?

Children with infective conjunctivitis do not need to be excluded from school or childcare, unless there is an outbreak of infective conjunctivitis.

Infective conjunctivitis is a self-limiting illness and most infections clear up within a few days to a few weeks on their own. It is contagious if you are in close contact with others, so there is some guidance to help you reduce the risk as explained above. Remember you may be infectious for up to 14 days from the start of your symptoms.

Allergic conjunctivitis

This is inflammation of the conjunctiva due to an allergic reaction and the most common cause is an allergy to pollen/grass. This occurs at the same time each year, usually in both eyes. Other causes are less common such as allergies to house dust mite, cosmetics, and problems with contact lenses.

It is more common in people with atopy - a hereditary disorder where you have the tendency to develop immediate allergic reactions to things such as pollen, dust, and food, and which leads to hay fever, asthma, or similar allergic conditions, and often occurs with allergic rhinitis. Allergic rhinitis often causes cold-like symptoms, such as sneezing, itchiness and a blocked or runny nose.

It causes red, watery, itchy eyes and eye drops usually ease the symptoms

Things you should do - Allergic conjunctivitis	Things you should not do
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Place cool compresses (such as a flannel soaked in cold water) on the affected eyes to ease symptoms.• Avoid exposure to the allergen when practical.• Use lubricating eye drops or artificial tears which may reduce eye discomfort; these are available over the counter from pharmacies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do not rub your eyes.• Do not wear any contact lens in the affected eye(s) until all symptoms and signs of infection have completely gone and any treatment has been completed for 24 hours.

When do I need to get help?

- If your eye becomes extremely painful or you have a headache not relieved by simple painkillers like Paracetamol
- Light starts to hurt your eyes (photophobia).
- Spots or blisters develop on the skin next to the eye.
- Your vision becomes affected.

If you are concerned about your progress, or if you have not improved within 7 days, we advise you to contact your GP or return to the Emergency Department/MIU where you were seen.

If you are at all concerned about your injury please contact the relevant Emergency Department (ED) /Minor Injury Unit (MIU):

Royal Gwent Hospital (RGH): 01633 234056

Nevill Hall Hospital (NHH): 01873 732073

Grange University Hospital (GUH): 01633 493287

Ysbyty Ystrad Fawr (YYF) MIU: 01443 802353

Ysbyty Aneurin Bevan (YAB) MIU: 01495 363318

References:

<https://patient.info/health/eye-problems/infective-conjunctivitis#nav-8>

<https://cks.nice.org.uk/conjunctivitis-infective#!scenario:1>

<https://www.moorfields.nhs.uk/condition/conjunctivitis>

<https://cks.nice.org.uk/topics/conjunctivitis-allergic/>

**“This document is available in Welsh /
Mae’r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg”.**