

# CONJUNCTIVITIS (Pink Eye)

## TO YOUR HEALTH - PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUT

# 7.3

### DESCRIPTION

An inflammation (redness and soreness) of the conjunctiva. The conjunctiva is a clear membrane that covers the white part of the eye and the inside of the eyelids.

### FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Symptoms may affect one or both eyes:

- Clear, green or yellow discharge from the eye
- After sleeping, crusts on lashes that cause eyelids to stick together
- Eye discomfort or pain
- Swollen eyelids
- Sensitivity to bright light.
- Redness and gritty feeling in the eye
- Intense itching (allergic conjunctivitis only)

### CAUSES

- Viral or bacterial infection. Conjunctivitis may accompany colds or childhood diseases such as measles. These infections can be spread from one eye to another and person to person.
- Chemical irritation or wind, dust, smoke and other types of air pollution or home chemicals.
- Allergies caused by cosmetics, pollen or other allergens.
- A partially closed tear duct.

### RISK INCREASES WITH

- Newborns of mothers who are carriers of gonorrhea or chlamydia.
- Using contaminated make-up.
- Contact with an infected person
- Contact lens wearers
- Children and elderly

### PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Wash hands frequently with soap and warm water.
- Avoid exposure to eye irritants.
- Do not share eye make-up. Discard old makeup
- Care for contact lenses properly

### EXPECTED OUTCOME

- Allergic conjunctivitis can be cured if the allergen is removed. However, it is likely to recur.
- Most forms will heal in one to two weeks on their own. Sometimes treatment is needed.

### POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Complications are rare, but may include other eye infections or problems of the cornea.

### GENERAL MEASURES

Treatment of conjunctivitis varies with the cause. Wash hands often with antiseptic soap, and use paper towels to dry hands. Don't touch eyes. Gently wipe the discharge from the eye using disposable tissues. Infections are frequently spread by contaminated fingers, towels, handkerchiefs or wash cloths that have touched the infected eye. Use warm or cold water compresses to reduce discomfort. Don't use eye makeup. Do not use contact lenses until infection is resolved. If the infection does not improve in two to three days, it may be caused by an insensitive bacteria, virus or allergy. At this point, a physician may need to determine the cause of conjunctivitis.

### MEDICATION

- You may use nonprescription artificial tears in the eyes to help relieve symptoms.
- Antibiotic eye drops or ointments may be prescribed. Antibiotics taken by mouth may be prescribed for more severe cases.
- Steroid eye drops or ointments may be prescribed. Follow instructions carefully as these products can cause other, more severe eye problems.
- For allergic conjunctivitis, you may use nonprescription anti-allergy eye drops.

### ACTIVITY

Resume your normal activities as soon as symptoms improve.

### NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF..

- The infection does not improve in 48 hours, despite treatment.
- Fever occurs or pain increases.
- Vision is affected.

## Student Health Center

## WWW.SIU.EDU/~SHC

This information is for educational purposes only. Consult your doctor for specific medical advice, diagnosis and treatment.



## 618-453-3311

Dial-A-Nurse is available after-hours until 10:30 p.m. during fall and spring semesters. In case of emergency dial 911.