



CONJUNCTIVITIS – What is it?

The conjunctiva is a thin see through layer, which covers the front of the eye and the inside of the eyelids. Conjunctivitis is inflammation of this layer and is most commonly caused by infection or allergic conditions like hay fever. Conjunctivitis is very common and will occur in more than 1% of people each year.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of conjunctivitis vary depending on the cause. The most common symptoms are eye redness and watering of the eyes. Both eyes can be affected. A feeling of grit in the eye, a sticky discharge, and itchiness can also occur. If itching is the predominant symptom it is more likely that the conjunctivitis is caused by an allergy.

What is the treatment for conjunctivitis?

Most conjunctivitis does not need treatment and will resolve in less than 2 weeks. It may help to clean away any crusting or discharge with sterile cotton wool and cooled boiled water. It is important to wash your hands thoroughly as well as avoiding sharing pillows and towels to prevent passing infection to others. Allergy related conjunctivitis can be treated using antihistamines which can be bought over the counter from any chemist. In severe cases of infected conjunctivitis antibiotic eye drops may be needed, but most cases will resolve without drops. If you are not sure if treatment is needed it is best to contact your GP or pharmacist who should be able to help.

When to seek medical help

Most cases of conjunctivitis will improve without medical attention, but you should seek attention if:

- You wear contact lenses
- You have pain in your eyes
- Your eyes are sensitive to light
- Your vision is affected
- You have intense redness of your eye
- Your symptoms last longer than 2 weeks

Do I need time off work or school?

Public Health England advises that you do not need to take time off work or school with conjunctivitis. However it is still important to take the precautions such as regular hand washing and avoiding sharing towels to prevent spread.

What If my baby has symptoms?

Babies will often get sticky eyes and these can usually just be cleaned using cooled boiled water. Occasionally new born babies can catch conjunctivitis during the birth process. If this occurs it can be severe and need treatment. If you see redness of your baby's eye or are unsure you should see your GP or health visitor.

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Information taken from: Mims Fact file: Bacterial Conjunctivitis, the role of antibiotics (October 2014) NHS Choices, conjunctivitis can be found at <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Conjunctivitis-infective/Pages/Introduction.aspx>