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# 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 sleeping
- 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 bacterial conjunctivitis are self-limiting and resolve within 5–7 days without 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.
- ❖ **Lubricant eye drops, gel or ointment**– these may help reduce discomfort and grittiness but will not reduce the duration of the illness. These are available over the counter from pharmacies.
- ❖ **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.**

<b>Things you should do - Infective:</b>	<b>Things you shouldn't do:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wash your hands with soap regularly, especially after touching your eyes.</li> <li>• Regularly clean any sticky discharge or secretions from your eyelids. To do this boil water and let it cool down then gently wipe your eyelashes with cotton wool pad soaked in boiled and cooled water – use 1 pad for each eye.</li> <li>• Place cool compresses (such as a flannel soaked in cold water) on the affected eyes to ease symptoms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't share towels, pillows or utensils and keep a separate towel, flannel and soap for yourself.</li> <li>• Don't allow anyone else to use any ointment/ drops you are using.</li> <li>• Don't 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.</li> </ul>

**Can my child go to school/nursery?**

Children don't need to be excluded from school or childcare unless there is an outbreak of infective conjunctivitis. But as they tend to have close physical contact with each other, it is more easily passed among small children, so you may be asked to keep your child at home until the eye is no longer red or sticky to reduce the risk. 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 so if you are in close contact with others, to help you reduce the risk follow the guidance explained on page 1. Remember you may be infectious for up to 14 days from the start of your symptoms in case of viral conjunctivitis.

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

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.

<b>Things you should do – Allergic:</b>	<b>Things you shouldn't do:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Place cool compresses (such as a flannel soaked in cold water) on the affected eyes to ease symptoms</li> <li>• Avoid exposure to the allergen when practical.</li> <li>• Use lubricating eye drops or artificial tears which may reduce eye discomfort.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't rub your eyes</li> <li>• Don't 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.</li> </ul>

## 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 5 - 7 days, please contact your GP or return to the Emergency Department/MIU where you were seen.**

**References:** Infective Conjunctivitis (Patient info): Causes, Symptoms, and Treatment

Management | Conjunctivitis - infective | CKS | NICE

Conjunctivitis - allergic | Health topics A to Z | CKS | NICE

Allergic conjunctivitis advice and leaflet | Association of Optometrists

**This document is available in Welsh/  
Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg**