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Conjunctivitis

Conjunctivitis, commonly known as **pink eye**, is an infection of the thin membrane that lines the inside of the eyelids and the white part of the eye. The three most common types of conjunctivitis are viral, bacterial, and allergic. Each requires different treatments. With the exception of the allergic type, conjunctivitis is typically contagious.

The viral type is often associated with a cold or sore throat. Bacteria such as *Staphylococcus* and *Streptococcus* often cause bacterial conjunctivitis. The severity of the infection depends on the type of bacteria involved. The allergic type occurs more frequently among those with allergic conditions. When related to allergies, the symptoms are often seasonal. Allergic conjunctivitis may also be caused by intolerance to substances such as cosmetics, perfume, or drugs.

Symptoms

- Watery discharge
- Irritation or gritty feeling
- Itching
- Swollen eyelids
- Swelling of the conjunctiva
- Redness
- Tearing
- Mucous discharge that may cause the lids to stick together, especially after sleeping

Diagnosis

Conjunctivitis is diagnosed during an eye examination with a biomicroscope. In some cases cultures are taken to determine the type of bacteria causing the infection.

Treatment

Conjunctivitis requires medical attention. The appropriate treatment depends on the cause of the problem. Eye drops are prescribed in addition to nonsteroidal antiinflammatory medications, antihistamines, cool compresses, and artificial tears. Sometimes an oral antibiotic or ointment is used to treat the condition. Like the common cold, viral conjunctivitis has no cure; however, the symptoms can be relieved. Viral conjunctivitis usually resolves within 3 weeks.

To avoid spreading infection, take the following simple steps:

- Disinfect surfaces such as doorknobs and counters with diluted bleach solution
- Do not swim (some bacteria can be spread in the water)
- Avoid touching the face
- Wash hands frequently
- Do not share towels or washcloths
- Do not reuse handkerchiefs (tissues are best)
- Avoid shaking hands

