

# Allergic Conjunctivitis

## Overview

### What is conjunctivitis?

A clear, thin membrane called the conjunctiva covers your eyeball and the inside of your eyelids. If something irritates this covering, your eyes may become red and swollen. Your eyes also may itch, hurt or water. This is called conjunctivitis, also known as “pink eye.”

## Causes & Risk Factors

### What causes allergic conjunctivitis?

Many things can cause conjunctivitis, including bacteria, viruses or allergens. When an allergen causes the irritation, the condition is called allergic conjunctivitis. This type of conjunctivitis is not contagious. Some common allergens include:

- Pollen from trees, grass and ragweed
- Animal skin and secretions such as saliva
  - Perfumes
  - Cosmetics
- Skin medicines
  - Air pollution
  - Smoke

## Treatment

### How is allergic conjunctivitis treated?

It may help to put a cold washcloth over your eyes for relief. Lubricating eye drops (sometimes called artificial tears) may also make your eyes feel better. Antihistamine pills (which many people take for their allergies) may also help relieve your symptoms. You can buy lubricating eye drops and many antihistamine pills without a prescription.

Several other types of eye drops are available to treat allergic conjunctivitis. They can help relieve itchy, watery eyes and may keep symptoms from returning. Eye drops may contain an antihistamine, a decongestant, a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) or a mast-cell stabilizer. Some drops contain a combination of these. Some eye drops require a prescription. Talk to your doctor about which treatment is right for you.

### Do these treatments have side effects?

Many eye drops can cause burning and stinging when you first put them in, but this usually goes away in a few minutes. It is important to remember that all medicines may potentially cause side effects, so talk with your doctor before using any medicine, including eye drops.

### **Can I wear my contact lenses?**

It's not a good idea to wear contacts while you have allergic conjunctivitis because the contacts may cause the conjunctivitis to get worse. Instead, wear your glasses until your eyes feel better.

## *Prevention*

### **What can I do to avoid getting conjunctivitis?**

Try to identify and avoid the allergens that cause your symptoms. For example, if you are allergic to pollen or mold, stay indoors when pollen and mold levels are high. You can usually find out when allergen levels are high from the weather report. Keep your doors and windows closed, and use an air conditioner during the summer months.

*\*\*Modified from material provided from familydoctor.org*