

Pink Eye (Conjunctivitis)

Pink eye (conjunctivitis) is an inflammation or infection of the transparent membrane (conjunctiva) that lines your eyelid and covers the white part of your eyeball. When small blood vessels in the conjunctiva become inflamed, they're more visible. This is what causes the whites of your eyes to appear reddish or pink.

Pink eye is commonly caused by a bacterial or viral infection or an allergic reaction. It may affect one or both eyes.

Pink eye can be irritating, but it rarely affects your vision. Treatments can help ease the discomfort of pink eye. Because pink eye can be contagious, early diagnosis and treatment can help limit its spread.

Symptoms

- Redness
- Itchiness
- A discharge that forms a crust during the night that may prevent your eye or eyes from opening in the morning
- A gritty feeling
- Tearing

Causes of pink eye include:

- Viruses
- Bacteria
- Allergies
- A chemical splash in the eye
- A foreign object in the eye

More than half of bacterial conjunctivitis cases will clear up in one to two weeks without treatment. Taking an antibiotic may speed up the healing process.

In most cases, no treatment is available for viral conjunctivitis.

If you have allergic conjunctivitis, your doctor may prescribe from among many different types of eye drops for people with allergies.

Lifestyle and home remedies

- Apply a compress to your eyes. To make a compress, soak a clean, lint-free cloth in water and wring it out. Then apply it gently to your closed eyelids for a few minutes several times a day. Generally, a cool water compress will feel the most soothing. But you can also use a warm compress if that feels better to you.

If pink eye affects only one eye, don't touch both eyes with the same cloth. This reduces the risk of spreading an infection from one eye to the other.

- Use eye drops. Over-the-counter eye drops called artificial tears may relieve symptoms. Some eye drops contain antihistamines or other medications that can be helpful for people with allergic conjunctivitis.

Avoid eye drops for red eye (Visine, Clear Eyes) because they tend to work for a while then cause rebound redness.

- Stop wearing contact lenses. If you wear contact lenses, stop wearing them until your eyes feel better. How long you'll need to go without contact lenses depends on what's causing your conjunctivitis.

- Avoid whatever causes your symptoms. This tip may be helpful if you have allergic conjunctivitis.

- Wash your clothes frequently. This tip may be helpful if you have allergic conjunctivitis.

- Bathe or shower before bedtime. This tip may be helpful if you have allergic conjunctivitis.

Preventing the spread of pink eye

Practice good hygiene to control the spread of pink eye. For instance:

- Don't touch your eyes with your hands.

- Wash your hands often.

- Use only clean towels and washcloths.

- Don't share towels or washcloths.

- Change your pillowcases often.

- Avoid swimming in a swimming pool.

- Throw away your eye cosmetics, such as mascara.

- Don't share eye cosmetics or personal eye care items.

By Mayo Clinic Staff