

## **Patient Information:**

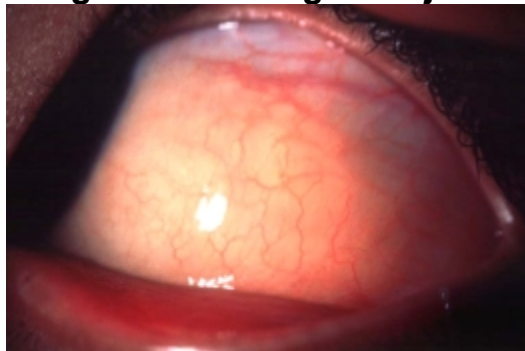
# **Allergic Conjunctivitis**

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### **What is allergic conjunctivitis?**

Conjunctivitis means inflammation of the conjunctiva. The conjunctiva is the thin 'skin' that covers the white part of the eyes and the inside of the eyelids. Allergic conjunctivitis causes red, watery, and itchy eyes. It is commonly caused by allergy to pollen and is not an infection.

### **Photographs of typical conjunctival swelling seen in allergic conjunctivitis**



### **What causes allergic conjunctivitis?**

**Pollen** - Most cases of allergic conjunctivitis occur in the hay fever season. Grass pollens tend to cause symptoms in early summer. Various other pollens and moulds may cause symptoms later in the summer. Other symptoms of hay fever such as a runny nose and sore throat may also occur.

**Animals** - often household pets

**Cosmetics** - eye make-up etc.

**Unknown** - often it is impossible to identify a specific cause.

## **What are the symptoms of allergic conjunctivitis?**

Both eyes are usually affected and symptoms tend to develop quickly. Typically, the eyes are itchy, and look red or pink. A burning feeling may occur but the eyes are not usually painful. The eyelids tend to swell. The eyes water more than usual, but do not become too 'gluey' as in infective conjunctivitis. Vision is not usually affected. In more severe cases the conjunctiva under the upper eyelids may swell, produce a lot of mucus, and look lumpy.

## **What is the treatment for allergic conjunctivitis?**

- No treatment - if symptoms are mild.
- Avoid the cause of the allergy - if at all possible.
- Cold compresses - with a flannel soaked in cold water eases itch and irritation.
- Eye drops - to reduce inflammation are often prescribed. You need to take them regularly to keep symptoms away until the source of the allergy goes. Some people find one preparation works better than another. Therefore if the first does not work, a switch to another may help. If your eyelids are very swollen, it may take a while for eye drops to fully ease symptoms.
- Antihistamine tablets - You can take these to ease the general symptoms of hay fever.
- Steroid eye drops - Steroids are good at reducing inflammation. However, they are normally only used under the supervision of an ophthalmologist as infection and other causes of conjunctivitis need to be definitely ruled out. (Steroids can make some eye conditions worse). Most cases of allergic conjunctivitis settle on milder drops.
- Do not wear contact lenses when you have conjunctivitis.

**Most cases start to settle on treatment after a few days. However, you should see your doctor again if any of the following occur.**

1. Symptoms change (for example, light starts to hurt your eyes).
2. Pain becomes worse (mild soreness rather than pain is usual with conjunctivitis).
3. Spots or blisters develop on the skin next to the eye.
4. Your vision becomes affected.

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**Disclaimer**

*The information provided in this document is intended as a useful aid to general practitioners, optometrists and patients. It is impossible to diagnose and treat patients adequately without a thorough eye examination by a qualified ophthalmologist, optometrist or your general practitioner. Hopefully the information will be of use prior to and following a consultation which it supplements and does not replace.*

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