

HEALTH TOPICS

Conjunctivitis

Overview

- Conjunctivitis is an inflammation of the thin clear tissue that covers the white part of the eye (sclera) and the inside surface of the eyelids.
- This condition causes the sclera to appear pink or red and can affect people of all ages, in one or both eyes.
- Symptoms may include a gritty, sandy, or scratching feeling; a clear, green, or yellow discharge; tearing, itching, eye pain, and sensitivity to bright light.

Signs & Symptoms

Red eye and irritation are usually the main presenting symptoms of all types of conjunctivitis. The common causes of conjunctivitis include;

- **Viral conjunctivitis:** thin or watery discharge, sometimes tender lymph nodes can be palpated in front of the ears. May accompany colds and other viruses.
- **Bacterial conjunctivitis:** thicker, cloudy or pus-like discharge.
- **Allergic conjunctivitis:** increased tearing or scant white stringy discharge, itching & often mild eyelid and conjunctival swelling. Caused by pollens, dust, animal dander, fabrics, cosmetics, etc.
- **Eye irritation** may also be caused by;
 - Chemicals in direct contact with the eye i.e. chlorine in swimming pools.
 - plants like jalapeno peppers, noxious fumes, eye drops.
 - Mechanical i.e. rubbing the eye or foreign body in the eye
 - Intense light i.e. excessively strong sunlight, sunlamps, snow reflections

Prevention

- Wash your hands thoroughly & often, and also keep your hands away from your eyes.
- Avoid sharing washcloths, towels, pillowcases, eye make-up.
- Allergic conjunctivitis can be minimized by decreasing exposure to certain allergens or using medications, such as anti-histamines, that control symptoms
- Irritant conjunctivitis can be prevented by avoiding areas of high pollution such as dust & smoke, maintaining proper daily cleansing routine of contact lenses or periodic usage of sterile saline lubricating eye drops.

Treatment

The treatment for conjunctivitis depends on the cause.

- Eye drops or ointment may be prescribed. Drops need to be applied as directed (often multiple times a day) since they are quickly cleared from the eye.

- Cool compresses may soothe swelling and irritation.
- Avoid rubbing the eyes and exposure to irritants including any eye makeup until the conjunctivitis is resolved.
- Never wear contact lenses during treatment.
- Replace disposable contact lenses and case after treatment.
- For infectious causes, wash hands frequently and dry with paper towels to avoid spreading to others.
- Artificial tear eye drops may be used for minor irritations.
- Anti-allergy eye drops and oral allergy medications are available if appropriate.

How We Can Help

- If you would like to be seen by our medical staff, you can book an appointment [online](#) or by calling our Appointment Desk to [schedule an appointment](#).
- Also, our [Advice Nurse](#) service is free for all UCSB students to discuss health concerns and the options for medical care.
- [Over the counter \(OTC\) products](#) such as antihistamine eye drops and artificial tears are available for purchase at our Pharmacy located in the lobby of UCSB Student Health Service.

Recommended Resources

- Conjunctivitis (WebMD) <http://www.webmd.com/eye-health/eye-health-conjunctivitis>
- [Pink eye \(Conjunctivitis\)](#) (Mayo Clinic) <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/pink-eye/basics/definition/con-20022732>
- Conjunctivitis (CDC) <http://www.cdc.gov/conjunctivitis/>
- Conjunctivitis (Up-to-Date) <http://www.uptodate.com/contents/conjunctivitis>