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