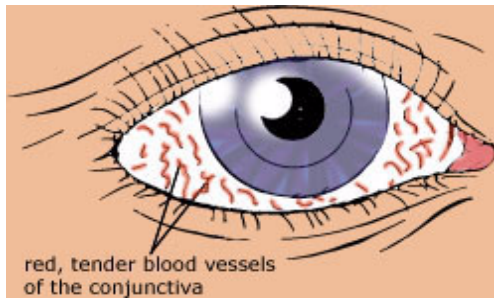


# Conjunctivitis

## What is conjunctivitis?

It is an inflammation of the *conjunctiva*, which is a thin, clear tissue that lines the eyelids and the eyeball, except the cornea. It is very common, but not a serious problem except in newborn infants.



## What causes conjunctivitis?

- bacterial infection
- viral infection
- allergies such as hay fever

Bacterial infections are common; the bugs are usually picked up from contaminated fingers, face cloths and towels. They are more likely to occur when you are run down, such as with a heavy cold, and when the tear ducts are blocked with a respiratory infection.

## What are the symptoms?

### Bacterial infection (usually both eyes)

- whites of the eyes red and sore
- yellow pus discharging from the eyes, making them sticky
- during sleep, this matter causes the eyelids to stick together so that they have to be prised open upon waking

### Viral infection

- a painful red eye
- slight discharge only

Viral conjunctivitis, which is also associated with upper respiratory infections, is the conjunctivitis that usually occurs in epidemics (known as 'pink eye'). It usually lasts 2 to 3 weeks and can be very contagious, so care needs to be taken not to infect others.

### Allergic conjunctivitis

- itchiness and redness of the whites of the eyes
- a gritty feeling in the eyes
- no discharge

A feeling of irritation and watering may be found with all these types.

## What is the treatment?

It is important to visit your doctor for care. Sometimes the cause is a foreign body, such as a piece of metal or a piece of an insect or another speck that has entered your eye without your being aware of it.

Your doctor may prescribe antibiotic or antiallergy drops or ointment, which you place in the eye as directed. The infection usually responds rapidly to treatment within 48 hours. If not, inform your doctor.

### Other points

- Avoid touching your eyes directly.
- Wash your hands regularly.
- Do not use make-up.
- Gently wipe any discharge with disposable tissues.

### Eye bathing with salt water

Antibiotics will not work if there is discharge still in your eyes, and so it is vital to wash away this debris with a weak, salty solution. It is preferable to have this warm. The solution can be made by dissolving 1 teaspoon of salt in half a litre (500 mL) of boiled water. Use this solution before instilling eye drops.

Another method is to add a pinch of salt to an eyebath of lukewarm water. Apply the eyebath closely to the rim of the eye, look upwards and blink the eye, which will then be irrigated by the solution.