

# Conjunctivitis

This fact sheet helps you to know what's 'normal' and what you can expect to happen if you suffer from Conjunctivitis. It also tells you when you should become concerned and seek advice from a health professional.

## Useful facts

- **What is Conjunctivitis?** Conjunctivitis is an infection in the membrane lining the eye and inside the eyelids, called the conjunctiva. The eye becomes red, sticky or watery and can be itchy, sore and uncomfortable. The infection can affect one eye or both eyes.
- **How common is Conjunctivitis?** Virus infections are very contagious (catching) and spread by contact with infected tissues, towels, pillowcases and even door handles and also by droplets spread through sneezing and coughing. Conjunctivitis affects men and women equally and you can get it at any age.
- **What's causing it?** Infection can be caused by a virus (such as the common cold or flu virus) or, less often, by bacteria. Allergic conjunctivitis is a similar process caused by a reaction to pollen (hayfever), or dust.

## What can I expect to happen?

- ✓ **Duration** Most infections will clear up on their own and treatment is not usually needed. Some people notice that they have a cold, sore throat or feel unwell at the same time

## What can I do myself to get better – now and in the future?

- ✓ **Cleaning** Clean any discharge / crusting away with a cotton pad and water.
- ✓ **Washing Hands** Washing hands frequently and not sharing towels / pillows is important to reduce the spread.
- ✓ **Eyedrops** Over the counter lubricant eye drops for the pharmacist may help to relieve discomfort.
- ✓ **Work and School** Public Health England (PHE) advises that you don't need to stay away from work, school or nursery unless you are feeling particularly unwell. Some nurseries have a policy of exclusion unless antibiotics are prescribed, despite the fact there is no evidence that exclusion reduces the chances of it spreading or that antibiotics shorten the duration of conjunctivitis.

## When should I seek medical help?

Conjunctivitis is not normally serious and in many cases gets better on its own. Speak to your GP surgery if symptoms have been present for more than a week. Contact your GP surgery for urgent advice if any of the following are present:

- **Eye pain** Conjunctivitis can be uncomfortable but it does not usually cause pain.
- **Photophobia** Sensitivity to light.
- **Disturbed vision** Wateriness and gunk may make your eyes blurry from time to time but should not truly affect your vision.
- **Very swollen eyelids**
- **New born babies**

## Where can I find out more?

Remember that your pharmacist can also help you with assessing your symptoms and advise on suitable treatments.



111 is the NHS non-emergency number. It's fast, easy and free. Call 111 and speak to a highly trained adviser, supported by healthcare professionals. They will ask you a series of questions to assess your symptoms and immediately direct you to the best medical care for you.

NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.