

Infective Conjunctivitis

If you require this information in an alternative language or format (such as Braille, audiotope or large print), please ask the staff who are looking after you.

What is infective conjunctivitis?

The outermost membrane covering your eye is known as the conjunctiva. It is a thin, transparent layer which covers the white of your eye and also the inside of your eyelids. Conjunctivitis is when this tissue is inflamed for any reason. This can be caused by allergy or by infection. If it happens because of an infection with a virus, usually the cold or flu virus, or bacteria, the condition is known as infective conjunctivitis. It is usually not serious.

What are the symptoms?

- One or both eyes may be affected. Typically symptoms start in one eye then spread to the other.
- Red and inflamed eye
- Blurred vision
- Swollen eyelids
- Watery or sticky discharge. This may stick the eyelids together, especially in the mornings
- Grittiness and discomfort or a burning sensation
- Itchiness
- Other symptoms: you may also have flu-like symptoms such as a sore throat, fever, muscle aches and feeling generally unwell

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What is the treatment?

The condition is self-limiting. It will clear up on its own within a few days to a few weeks.

1. Antibiotic eye drops or ointment

Viral infections do not respond to antibiotics and the infection may last for two to three weeks until your immune system clears the virus. Antibiotic drops or ointment may be helpful in conjunctivitis caused by bacteria.

2. Lubricant eye drops, gel or ointment

This will help to relieve symptoms of discomfort and grittiness but will not shorten the duration of the illness.

3. Simple painkillers

Paracetamol or ibuprofen tablets are available over the counter and can ease discomfort in your eye as well as any flu-like symptoms. As long as there is no medical reason which prevents you from taking non-steroidal painkillers such as ibuprofen.

4. Regular eyelid cleaning

You can clean sticky discharge and secretions away from the eye. Gently wipe your eyelids with a clean cotton wool pad soaked in cooled boiled water to clean off crusts. Use 1 piece of cotton wool for each eye then discard.

5. Warm/cool compresses

May provide some relief from ocular discomfort

6. Steroid eye drops

Steroid eye drops may be used in severe or persistent cases.

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Further advice

You do not need to stay away from work or school unless you or your child are feeling very unwell. Make sure you follow the hygiene measures outlined below to reduce the risk of spread. However, it is generally advised to stay at home if you work in close proximity to others, with vulnerable people such as children or the elderly or work in healthcare or the food service. If this is the case you should stay at home until the eye is no longer discharging or watery. Your nursery, school or work may have policies in place requiring you to stay away for a certain period of time.

Avoid using contact lenses until the condition has cleared completely.

Prevention of spread

Conjunctivitis is typically very contagious. Take the following measures to help reduce the risk of spread:

- Avoid touching your eyes wherever possible
- Wash hands: frequently and before and after administering eye drops
- Don't share: do not share towels, pillows or cosmetics. Do not share eye drops with any other family member.
- Wash your pillow cases and face cloths in hot water and detergent
- Cover your mouth and nose when sneezing and put used tissues in the bin
- Cleaning: use a separate, clean or disposable cloth for cleaning the eyes

When to seek advice

- If you develop very blurred vision
- If the pain and redness are getting a lot worse
- The light starts to hurt your eyes (photophobia)
- If you see any blisters or spots on your eyelids

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How do I contact the hospital?

If you require advice please telephone the Ophthalmic Outpatient Department between 9am – 5pm Monday to Friday on 01423 542217.

Further Information

Other sources of useful information can be found at:

NHS www.nhs.co.uk

Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust website www.hdft.nhs.uk

National Eye Institute <http://www.nei.nih.gov/health/>

Feedback

If you have a concern, complaint or compliment, or would like to provide feedback regarding your experience of the Ophthalmology Service / clinic, please contact the Patient Experience Team via the following:

Patient Experience helpline 01423 555499 (Monday – Friday 9.30am – 4pm)

E-mail: hdft.patientexperience@nhs.net

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