

Vision of Health

Red Eyes Bring The Blues To Allergy Sufferers

by Dr. Yvonne M. Johnson

(NAPSA)—It doesn't have to be hay-fever season for people to suffer from itchy, red eyes. They may be suffering from conjunctivitis, also called "pink eye." This is an inflammation of the thin membrane that covers the white of the eye, which is called the conjunctiva. A mucous discharge and a scratchy, burning feeling may accompany the redness.

Different types of conjunctivitis exist, and have many causes:

- Allergic conjunctivitis—One or both eyes are usually affected by itching. Other symptoms may include redness, swelling and excessive tearing.

- Bacterial conjunctivitis—One or both eyes may have a heavy discharge that can be yellowish.

- Viral conjunctivitis—One or both eyes are affected. Excessive eye watering and a light discharge may be present.

The only way to tell what type of conjunctivitis you have is to see an eye care professional. Bacterial conjunctivitis can be treated with antibiotics. Viral conjunctivitis usually clears up on its own. However allergic conjunctivitis is a different story.

People often take over-the-counter (OTC) antihistamine medicines to treat the immediate signs of the condition. But OTCs may offer only short-term relief and the medicines typically require frequent dosing. In addition, the OTCs are usually not recommended for children under age 6.

Prescription eye drops for allergies are usually the best treatment option for allergic conjunctivitis. They provide long-term relief and many offer more convenient dosing than OTCs.

A good, multiple-mechanism eye drop uses antihistamines to stop the immediate symptoms of eye allergies and a mast cell stabilizer to prevent the cause of the itching.



The Eyes Have It—Eye care professionals can usually help people with red, itchy, watery eyes find relief.

By preventing the release of histamine and other pro-inflammatory mediators and blocking the effect of histamine, prescription eye drops can eliminate the primary agent causing ocular itch.

If you have symptoms of any type of conjunctivitis, avoid rubbing or scratching your eyes and see your eye care professional.

Q. How can doctors operate on eyes without anesthesia?

A. They can't. The cornea of the eye has nerves, and it would hurt. Ophthalmologists usually apply a topical anesthesia in an eye drop form when they operate on patients for glaucoma, cataracts or Lasik surgery. These procedures are all performed on an out-patient basis.

Dr. Yvonne M. Johnson, an optometrist, is director of Regulatory and Medical Affairs at Novartis Ophthalmics, North America. Her column is part of the company's public health education initiatives. Have a question? Contact Dr. Johnson by e-mail at DoctorYJohnson@hotmail.com or write to her at Novartis Ophthalmics, 11695 John Creek Parkway, Duluth, GA 30097. Additional information on allergies can be found at www.zaditor.com.