

# Patient Information Leaflet

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# Conjunctivitis

Symptoms to look out for, and tips on  
how to treat it at home.

For further information visit

[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk) or [www.patient.co.uk](http://www.patient.co.uk)

**PLEASE NOTE: Babies under 4 weeks of age must be seen by a GP**

## **Common Symptoms**

- ◆ Conjunctivitis usually spreads to both eyes.
- ◆ The eyes may feel gritty and may water more than usual.
- ◆ Some mild soreness may develop, but the condition is not usually very painful.
- ◆ The eyelids may become swollen. They are often stuck together with gluey material (discharge) after a sleep.
- ◆ Vision is not normally affected. You may get some blurring of vision due to discharge at the front of the eye. However, this clears with blinking.
- ◆ The whites of the eyes can look inflamed, and red or pink.

## **What causes conjunctivitis?**

Most cases of infective conjunctivitis are caused by common germs (bacteria and viruses). These are often the same ones that cause coughs and colds. Conjunctivitis commonly develops when you have a cold or cough, although sometimes it occurs alone. In the vast majority of cases, infective conjunctivitis is not serious. It clears within a week or so without leaving any permanent damage to the eye.

## WHAT IS THE TREATMENT FOR CONJUNCTIVITIS?

The common option for mild or moderate cases is **no treatment**. Your tears contain chemicals that fight off germs (bacteria). **Without treatment, most cases of infective conjunctivitis clear on their own within 1-2 weeks. Often they clear within 2-5 days.** However there are some other options which may help to ease the symptoms:

- ⇒ **Bathing the eyes** - regularly using cool clean water and cotton wool, this will help to soothe the eyes and clean away any sticky discharge.
  
- ⇒ **Lubricant eye drops** - these may reduce eye discomfort and are available over the counter. Your pharmacist will be able to advise which ones they stock.
  
- ⇒ **Antibiotic eye drops** - such as Chloramphenicol, can also be purchased over the counter after discussion with the pharmacist. However these are usually only necessary in more severe cases, or those not clearing on their own.

### **Other Tips**

- Do not wear contact lenses until all symptoms have cleared
- Wash your hands regularly, particularly after touching or bathing the eyes
- To prevent passing infection on to others avoid sharing face towels or pillowcases
- Guidance from The Health Protection Agency states that it is not necessary to exclude a child from school or care - unless there is an outbreak of several cases.

## **You should see a GP if...**

- ◆ Symptoms are in a baby under 4 weeks of age

### **OR**

- ◆ You develop marked eye pain
- ◆ The white of your eye(s) become intensely red
- ◆ Light starts to hurt your eyes (photophobia)
- ◆ You develop spots or blisters on the skin around the eyes
- ◆ Your vision becomes affected
- ◆ Your symptoms are worsening or show no improvement after 7 days