Pink Eye (Conjunctivitis)

What is pink eye?
Conjunctivitis, commonly known as “pink eye,” is an inflammation of the membrane (conjunctiva) covering the eye and lining the inner surface of the eyelid.

What causes pink eye?
Pink eye can be caused by bacterial or viral microorganisms being introduced into the eye by contaminated hands, washcloths or towels, cosmetics (particularly eye makeup), false eyelashes, or extended wear contacts. Conjunctivitis can also accompany a viral cold or flu. Although some types of bacterial infections and some of the viral infections (particularly herpes) are not very common, they are potentially serious and contagious. Irritants, such as air pollutants, smoke, soap, hairspray, makeup, chlorine, and cleaning fluids, as well as seasonal allergic response to grass and other pollens can also cause pink eye.

What are the symptoms?
Symptoms may include itching, redness, sensitivity to light, the feeling of something in the eye, swelling of the lids, and discharge from the eyes. Vision may be affected from the increase in tear production.

How long does pink eye last?
It usually takes a few days to two weeks for this condition to clear up. Pink eye caused by an allergy may continue until the allergen is gone and will usually recur each year.

How is it treated?
Ointments, drops, or pills may be recommended to help kill the germ infecting the eye, relieve allergic symptoms, and decrease discomfort. For conjunctivitis caused by a viral cold or flu, the practitioner may recommend that you allow it to run its course.

What else can I do for pink eye?
- To reduce itching and swelling, apply cool compresses to the infected eye(s) three to four times per day for 10-15 minutes using a clean wash cloth each time.
- Wash your hands frequently and keep them away from your eyes to reduce or prevent recontamination.
- Avoid rubbing your eyes to decrease irritation.
- Wear sunglasses if your eyes are sensitive to the light.
- Avoid exposure to the irritants that may be causing the conjunctivitis.
- Dispose of old eye makeup if the culture for bacteria is positive.
- Use a clean pillowcase each night or every other night, turning over nightly.
- Avoid wearing contact lenses while using medications or if your eyes are uncomfortable. Cleanse contact lenses thoroughly before wearing. Also cleanse contact case before wearing contacts or placing new contacts in the case.

How do I prevent pink eye?
Many types of conjunctivitis are hard to prevent; however, there are ways to decrease your risk of reacquiring it or spreading it to someone else.

- Do not share cosmetics with anyone.
- Avoid sharing washcloths or towels.
- Wash hands frequently and keep away from the eyes.
- Wear protective goggles if you are exposed to irritating chemicals while swimming or working.
- Do not use eye drops or ointments prescribed for someone else.
- Avoid swimming in non-chlorinated pools or stagnant lakes or ponds.
- Do not save medication; dispose of it when treatment is completed and check for expiration date.

When should I seek additional medical help?
If any of the following problems should occur, notify your clinician: visual changes, severe eye pain, pain when moving eyes, fever, no improvement within 48 hours with medication, drainage continues after completing full course of medication, roommates or other family members develop symptoms, or eyes become very sensitive to light.

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