



Mr Vaughan Tanner BSc MBBS FRCOphth
Consultant Ophthalmic Surgeon
www.tanner-eyes.co.uk

Spire Dunedin Hospital
22 Bath Road
Reading
RG1 6NS

Circle Hospital
100 Drake Way
Reading
RG2 0NE

The London Clinic
119 Harley Street
London
W1G 6AU

Princess Margaret Hospital
Osborne Road
Windsor
SL4 3SJ

Tel: 0800 644 0700 / 0800 644 0900

Fax: 0118 986 9262 / 0118 955 3535

Windsor@tanner-eyes.co.uk

Reading@tanner-eyes.co.uk

Allergic Conjunctivitis

What is allergic conjunctivitis?

Conjunctivitis means inflammation of the conjunctiva. The conjunctiva is the thin 'skin' that covers the white part of the eyes and the inside of the eyelids. Allergic conjunctivitis causes red, watery, and itchy eyes. It is commonly caused by allergy to pollen and is not an infection.

Photograph of typical conjunctival swelling seen in allergic conjunctivitis



What causes allergic conjunctivitis?

Pollen - most cases of allergic conjunctivitis occur in the hay fever season. Grass pollens tend to cause symptoms in early summer. Various other pollens and moulds may cause symptoms later in the summer. Other symptoms of hay fever such as a runny nose and sore throat may also occur.

Animals - often household pets

Cosmetics - eye make-up etc.

Unknown - often it is impossible to identify a specific cause.

Disclaimer

The information provided in this document is intended as a useful aid to general practitioners, optometrists and patients. It is impossible to diagnose and treat patients adequately without a thorough eye examination by a qualified ophthalmologist, optometrist or your general practitioner. Hopefully the information will be of use prior to and following a consultation which it supplements and does not replace.

Copyright

All images and graphics used in this document are subject to copyright law. Mr Tanner is particularly grateful to Mr JJ Kanski and for allowing reproduction of several of his clinical photos on this document.

What are the symptoms of allergic conjunctivitis?

Both eyes are usually affected and symptoms tend to develop quickly. Typically, the eyes are itchy, and look red or pink. A burning feeling may occur but the eyes are not usually painful. The eyelids tend to swell. The eyes water more than usual, but do not become too 'gluey' as in infective conjunctivitis. Vision is not usually affected. In more severe cases the conjunctiva under the upper eyelids may swell, produce a lot of mucus, and look lumpy.

What is the treatment for allergic conjunctivitis?

- No treatment - if symptoms are mild.
- Avoid the cause of the allergy - if at all possible.
- Cold compresses - with a flannel soaked in cold water eases itch and irritation.
- Eye drops - to reduce inflammation are often prescribed. You need to take them regularly to keep symptoms away until the source of the allergy goes. Some people find one preparation works better than another. Therefore if the first does not work, a switch to another may help. If your eyelids are very swollen, it may take a while for eye drops to fully ease symptoms.
- Antihistamine tablets - You can take these to ease the general symptoms of hay fever.
- Steroid eye drops - Steroids are good at reducing inflammation. However, they are normally only used under the supervision of an ophthalmologist as infection and other causes of conjunctivitis need to be definitely ruled out. (Steroids can make some eye conditions worse). Most cases of allergic conjunctivitis settle on milder drops.
- Do not wear contact lenses when you have conjunctivitis.

Most cases start to settle on treatment after a few days. However, you should see your doctor again if any of the following occur.

1. Symptoms change (for example, light starts to hurt your eyes).
2. Pain becomes worse (mild soreness rather than pain is usual with conjunctivitis).
3. Spots or blisters develop on the skin next to the eye.
4. Your vision becomes affected.