

# RED EYES-ALLERGIC CONJUNCTIVITIS

## INTRODUCTION

Our eyes are probably one of the most sensitive parts of the body. They are constantly exposed to the environment, which makes them vulnerable to come into contact with foreign particles, such as dust, sharp objects, pollen or micro-organisms.

The sensitive cells in the eyes will immediately react when coming into contact with these particles which will result in an allergic reaction.

Allergic reactions of the eye are called allergic conjunctivitis.

## WHAT HAPPENS WITH ALLERGIC CONJUNCTIVITIS?

- Allergic reactions are the body's way of reacting to a foreign object or an invader.
- These foreign objects or invaders are called antigens. The antigens trigger the immune system to cause an allergic response.
- During the allergic response, a chemical called histamine is released, which causes the blood vessels in the eye to widen causing reddening of the eyes and inflammation.
- This is usually accompanied by intense itching and excessive tearing.

## SYMPTOMS

- The following are signs and symptoms of allergic conjunctivitis:
  - Reddening of the eyes, intense itching.
  - Excessive watering.
  - Runny and stuffy nose with a clear and watery nasal discharge.
  - Sneezing.
- Sometimes if the person is hypersensitive, other parts of the body can also be involved:
  - Skin irritation, itching, swelling and hives
  - Wheezing, difficult breathing and coughing.

## WHAT CAUSES IT?

- Almost anything can trigger allergic conjunctivitis in sensitive individuals. Triggers may vary from:
  - Dust, pollen and animal dander
  - Chemical substances and plants
  - Medicine
  - Food allergies such as peanuts, strawberries, dairy and wheat
  - Insect bites from bees or even mosquitoes
  - Extreme temperatures especially cold weather conditions.
- Causes of allergic conjunctivitis can vary from person-to-person and it can be a challenging task to pinpoint the exact cause.

## MANAGEMENT AND TREATMENT

### Prevent contact with allergens

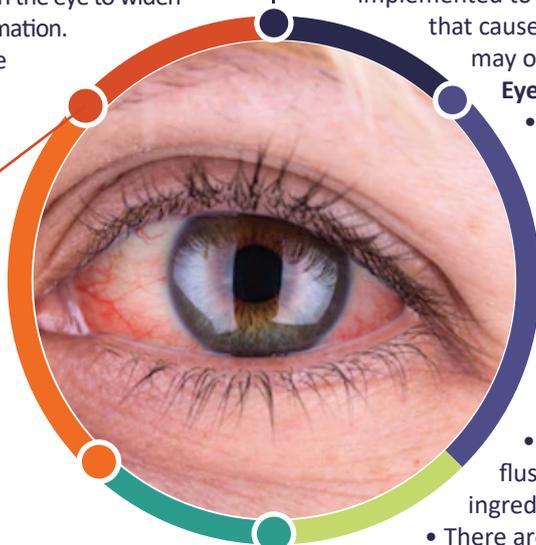
Total elimination of allergens is impossible, but all steps should be implemented to minimise direct eye contact with the allergen that causes the allergy. Wearing of protective sunglasses may offer some protection.

### Eye drops

- Allergic conjunctivitis can be treated with some eye drops available without a prescription called antihistamine eye drops.
  - It is important to wash your hands before and after treating your eyes.
  - Some eye drops contain homeopathic ingredients and can relieve the symptoms associated with allergic conjunctivitis. It works by stimulating the eye's natural ability to fight allergy symptoms and it is suitable for long-term use.
- The use of natural tear drops may assist in flushing the allergen from the eye. It contains ingredients that will lubricate and hydrate the eyes.
- There are also eye solutions available in pharmacy that can be used by contact lens wearers. It will help to comfort dry, irritated and tired eyes.

## TREATMENT

- Red, itchy, allergic eyes is a very common condition, especially during dry seasons and spring when there are lots of pollen and dust in the air.
- Avoidance of the particles that causes the allergy may be difficult, but good news is that there are several products on the market that can bring relief.



# DISCLAIMER

## TAKE NOTE

The information provided in this article is for education purposes only and does not serve as a medical diagnosis. Members should always consult their healthcare provider with serious symptoms.

Please note that Heritage Health plans do not necessarily cover the costs of the condition/s described.

