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CONJUNCTIVITIS

DESCRIPTION

An inflammation of the eyelid's underside and white part of the eye. It is more common in children.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

The following symptoms may affect one or both eyes:

- Clear, green or yellow discharge from the eye.
- After sleeping, crusts on lashes that cause eyelids to stick together.
- Eye pain.
- Swollen eyelids.
- Sensitivity to bright light.
- Redness and gritty feeling in the eye.
- Intense itching (allergic conjunctivitis only).

CAUSES

- Viral infection. Conjunctivitis may accompany colds or childhood diseases such as measles.
- Bacterial infection.
- Chemical irritation or wind, dust, smoke and other types of air pollution or home chemicals.
- Allergies caused by cosmetics, pollen or other allergens.
- A partially closed tear duct.
- Intense light, such as from sunlamps, snow reflection or electric arcs in welding.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Newborns of mothers who are carriers of gonorrhea or chlamydia.
- Crowded or unsanitary living conditions.
- Exposure to others in public places, such as day care centers and public schools.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Wash hands frequently with soap and warm water.
- Avoid exposure to eye irritants.
- Newborns in hospital deliveries are routinely given antibiotic eye drops.
- Do not share eyeliners, and discard mascara after 4-6 months.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- Allergic conjunctivitis can be cured if the allergen is removed. However, it is likely to recur.
- Other forms are curable in 1 to 2 weeks (sometimes longer depending on the cause) with treatment.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

If untreated, conjunctivitis may spread and damage the cornea permanently, impairing vision.

Treatment

GENERAL MEASURES

- Treatment of conjunctivitis varies with the cause.
- Wash hands often with antiseptic soap, and use paper towels to dry. Don't touch eyes. Gently wipe the discharge from the eye using disposable tissues.
- Infections are frequently spread by contaminated fingers, towels, handkerchiefs or wash cloths that have touched the infected eye.
- Use warm-water soaks or cold water to reduce discomfort.
- Don't use eye makeup.
- If the infection does not improve in 2 or 3 days, it may be caused by an insensitive bacteria, virus or allergy. At this point, an ophthalmologist may need to culture the conjunctivae or make special studies to determine the cause of the conjunctivitis.
- Do not wear contact lenses until inflammation is cleared.

MEDICATIONS

- Antibiotic or antiviral eye drops, sulfa eye drops, or ointment to fight infection. (Most eye care specialists believe steroid eye drops should not be used until a diagnosis is definite. If the infection is caused by herpes simplex virus, steroids may spread it from the conjunctiva to the cornea, damaging the eye).
- Oral antibiotics may be prescribed.

Notify Our Office If

- You or a family member has symptoms of conjunctivitis.
- The infection does not improve in 48 hours, despite treatment.
- Fever occurs.
- Pain increases.
- Vision is affected.