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Perspective

Understanding the Causes and Treatment Approaches in Conjunctivitis

Amelia Foster*

Department of Ophthalmology, Riverside University, Leeds, United Kingdom

DESCRIPTION

Conjunctivitis, commonly referred to as pink eye, is an inflammation of the conjunctival layer of the eye, which covers the sclera and lines the inner eyelids. It affects individuals of all ages and can result from multiple causes, including infectious agents, allergens and irritants. The condition often produces noticeable redness, swelling and discomfort, prompting patients to seek evaluation. Viral conjunctivitis is among the most frequent causes and is often associated with respiratory infections. Symptoms include redness, tearing, burning sensations and sometimes a mild watery discharge. It typically affects one eye initially, but the other eye can become involved within a few days. Viral forms are highly contagious and close contact can facilitate transmission. Hygiene measures, including frequent handwashing and avoiding shared personal items, are essential to limit spread. Bacterial conjunctivitis arises from pathogenic bacteria, producing a thicker, yellow-green discharge that may crust over the eyelashes, particularly in the morning. One or both eyes may be affected and the condition can resolve spontaneously, although antibiotic therapy is frequently used to shorten disease duration and reduce the risk of complications. Children in school settings are particularly susceptible, making hygiene education and appropriate treatment important.

Allergic conjunctivitis occurs when the immune system responds to environmental allergens such as pollen, dust mites or animal dander. Patients often experience intense itching, watery eyes and swelling of the eyelids. This form of conjunctivitis usually affects both eyes simultaneously. Management involves minimizing exposure to allergens, using antihistamine or anti-inflammatory drops and applying cold compresses to reduce discomfort. Irritant-induced conjunctivitis results from chemical exposure, smoke or foreign objects in the eye. Symptoms typically appear shortly after exposure, with redness, tearing and stinging sensations. The primary management step is removing the irritant and rinsing the eye with sterile saline or water. Protective eyewear and careful handling of chemicals can prevent

recurrence. Diagnosis of conjunctivitis depends on careful history taking and clinical examination. The clinician assesses the onset, type of discharge, whether one or both eyes are involved and associated symptoms such as itching or swelling. Slit-lamp examination allows detailed inspection of the conjunctiva and cornea, helping identify subtle changes that could suggest more severe conditions. In uncertain or persistent cases, cultures or laboratory tests may be employed to identify infectious agents.

Treatment strategies are tailored according to the cause. Viral and allergic types often improve with supportive care, including lubricating eye drops and cold compresses. Bacterial conjunctivitis typically responds well to topical antibiotics, which can reduce disease duration and minimize transmission risk. Patient education plays a critical role in management, emphasizing hygiene practices and adherence to prescribed treatments. Complications are uncommon but can occur, particularly when the condition is severe or untreated. Prolonged inflammation may lead to secondary infection or keratitis, which involves the cornea. Follow-up appointments ensure symptoms resolve and prevent long-term damage.

CONCLUSION

Preventive measures are essential to reduce the incidence and transmission of conjunctivitis. Maintaining hand hygiene, avoiding touching the eyes and not sharing towels or other personal items are key strategies. Individuals working in environments with high exposure to irritants or allergens should take precautions, including using protective eyewear and minimizing contact with triggering substances. Although conjunctivitis is often self-limiting, early recognition, accurate diagnosis and appropriate treatment contribute to faster recovery and reduce the risk of complications. Patients benefit from understanding the nature of the condition, the expected course and preventive measures to avoid recurrence or spread.

Correspondence to: Amelia Foster, Department of Ophthalmology, Riverside University, Leeds, United Kingdom; Email: amelia.foster@riversideuni.uk

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