



VIRAL CONJUNCTIVITIS

WHAT IS VIRAL CONJUNCTIVITIS?

Conjunctivitis is an inflammation of the conjunctivae, which are the mucous membranes covering the white of the eyes and the inner side of the eyelids. It usually affects both eyes at the same time although it may start in one eye and spread to the other after a day or two. It may be asymmetrical, affecting one eye more than the other. Conjunctivitis is a very common eye condition. It is not serious but can be very uncomfortable and irritating. Viral conjunctivitis is often associated with the common cold. This may be caused by a virus called 'adenovirus'. This type of conjunctivitis can spread rapidly between people and may cause an epidemic of conjunctivitis.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF VIRAL CONJUNCTIVITIS?

The eyes are red and there may be a watery discharge. The eyes are uncomfortable and there may also be symptoms of a cold. Sometimes there are tender lymph nodes around the ear or the neck. This type of conjunctivitis may also spread to affect the cornea (keratitis) and it may persist for several weeks.

HOW IS VIRAL CONJUNCTIVITIS TREATED?

There is no effective treatment for viral conjunctivitis but the eyes may be made more comfortable by using a lubricant.

As this is a highly contagious condition it is important to ensure that a strict code of hygiene is adhered to, such as hand and face washing and no sharing of face towels. This condition may go on for a prolonged time and in some instances corticosteroid drops have been advocated although these should only be given under the strict supervision of an eye specialist (ophthalmologist).

WHAT SHOULD I PAY PARTICULAR ATTENTION TO?

If there is any worsening of the symptoms despite treatment or if the vision deteriorates, then a further consultation with your doctor should be requested even if treatment is being carried out.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO AVOID VIRAL CONJUNCTIVITIS?

Good hygiene of hands and face is important. There should be no sharing of face towels, especially if someone has conjunctivitis.

Conjunctivitis can spread from one eye to the other, especially when you rub your eyes. Pus and crust should be removed by bathing the eye with lukewarm salt water which can also lessen the symptoms. Use disposable tissues when you dry the eyes and throw them away after use. This will limit the contamination. Dispose of any antibiotic eye drops after the treatment is over.

People who suffer from conjunctivitis should have a special towel that only they use.

HOW DOES CONJUNCTIVITIS USUALLY PROGRESS?

Even if left untreated, most forms of conjunctivitis will gradually get better on their own in a few weeks. With appropriate treatment the eyes are usually more comfortable within a few days, although cases of adenoviral infection may cause problems for some weeks.

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