

## Allergic Conjunctivitis



### What is allergic conjunctivitis?

The acute or chronic collection of symptoms and signs associated with an allergic reaction on the outer covering of the eye and lids, the conjunctiva. Just as systemic allergies can result in the symptoms of hay fever, the same reactions can result in these “eye allergies.”

### What are the symptoms of allergic conjunctivitis?

Red, bloodshot eyes, watery eyes, and itching.

### Who gets allergic conjunctivitis?

Many of our patients have symptoms of conjunctivitis. It is most common in the Spring and Fall, though some patients suffer from this disease all year long.

### Do systemic anti-allergy pills help with the ocular symptoms?

Systemic anti-allergy pills typically have a limited effect on eye allergies. Some patients get more eye relief than others when taking a systemic anti-allergy medication.

### How do allergies start in the eye?

Let's start with mast cells. Mast cells are immune system cells that are loaded with histamine compounds. Mast cells sit in waiting, ready to unload their contents into the surrounding bodily tissues to trigger the un-needed immune response that results in the symptoms of the allergy. Allergens are the microscopic particles that trigger an allergic reaction and include pollen, dust mite waste, smoke, cosmetics, and pet dander. When allergens reach a mast cell, the mast cell disintegrates, spilling its histamine contents and kick-starting the allergic reaction.

## How can patients avoid getting allergic conjunctivitis?

The first step to avoiding allergic conjunctivitis is to avoid contact with the allergens in the first place. Wash your hands after petting your dog or cat. For those people with pollen allergies, taking a shower at night cleans your hair of potential allergens, as does changing your pillowcase regularly. Cold compresses can reduce some of the swelling associated with an allergic reaction, and provides quick relief for a mild allergic conjunctivitis.

## How can patients medically treat allergic conjunctivitis?

The root cause of the allergic reaction are the mast cells breaking open and releasing histamines, so naturally, stabilizing the mast cells and preventing them from spilling their contents should be a priority. Mast cell stabilizers prevent histamines from being released in the first place, and work well for those patients that suffer from allergies year-round, or for an entire season. Mast cell stabilizers do work great, but can take several weeks to reach their full potential.

## How do antihistamines help with allergic symptoms?

For faster relief, antihistamines are to the rescue! These medications work to deactivate histamines that have already been released. While they work quickly, their effects are short-lived. Most over-the-counter anti-allergy medications are antihistamines. There are some medications that offer both antihistamine and mast cell stabilizing properties. These medications provide instant relief via the antihistamine, as well as long-term allergy control via the mast cell stabilizer. It's little surprise that the best anti-allergy medications are available only by prescription. Some of our doctors' favorite medications include Pataday® (Alcon), Lastacaft® (Allergan), and Bepreve® (Bausch and Lomb).

## What if a patient's allergies are exceptionally bad?

For those allergies that are completely out of control, extra help is needed in the form of a prescribed topical steroid medication. Steroids calm the immune system, and if an allergic reaction is too big to be soothed by antihistamines alone, steroids can be turned to for powerful relief. Once a comfortable baseline is achieved after use of the steroids, a course of antihistamines and mast cell stabilizers will allow the patient to maintain good comfort over time. While steroids do a great job when used properly, they can cause fluctuations in intraocular pressure (potentially leading to glaucoma), cataracts, and rebound inflammation if the steroids are not properly tapered after use.

## So what's the bottom line with allergic conjunctivitis?

Eye allergies can get in the way of what you want to do, though with proper management, you can minimize the effect of allergic conjunctivitis on your life. Please call our office today at **(303) 450-2020** to schedule an exam so our doctors can help you minimize or eliminate the effects of eye allergies!

