

Pink Eye



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This eye has pink eye. It features dilated blood vessels, and looks mildly painful. The common pink or red eye refers specifically to a viral infection of the outermost layer of the eye, the conjunctiva. Infection or inflammation of the conjunctiva is known as a "conjunctivitis." It can cause watering of the eyes and mild discomfort, but will generally clear up without incident. Pink eye can also occur with other eye diseases that may require more active management to effectively resolve. We encourage all of our patients to visit our office as soon as possible when they, or their child, have a pink or red eye. Using special dyes and our biomicroscopes, our eye doctors can inspect the surface of the eyes and lids to accurately determine the cause of the disease. There is no eye drop that will treat every type of red eye, and knowing the cause of the patient's disease will direct our treatment. Besides the common viral pink eye, bacterial infection, fungal infection, amoebic infection, ocular allergies, dry eye, ocular foreign bodies, meibomitis, blepharitis, and misdirected eyelashes can all cause red eyes.

A bacterial conjunctivitis can be caused by a variety of bacteria. Staphylococcus, E. coli, and H. influenza are just a few of the many potential types of bacteria that can infect the eyes. Patients with a bacterial conjunctivitis will often wake up in the morning with matted, sticky eyelids. For these patients, topical antibiotic medications are typically prescribed to clear the infection. More exotic infections include fungal and amoebic-caused eye infections. Fungal infections are frequently obtained from vegetative matter such as tree branches or splinters. Amoebic infections are frequently the result of exposure to swimming pool or Jacuzzi water, and are often caused specifically by contact lens wear in those environments. Because amoebas are single-celled animal organisms, and our patients are multi-celled animal organisms, amoebic keratitis cases are among the most difficult eye infections to treat. We strongly recommend that all patients avoid all contact lens wear when they are near pool water of any kind.

Another common cause of pink eye is an allergic conjunctivitis. Allergies can affect the eye at any age and during any season. Often times, allergies can produce a similar appearance to an infection, though the treatment usually will involve prescription topical antihistamines, and possibly the use of prescription topical anti-inflammatories (topical steroids) to calm the ocular tissue. The hallmark of allergic conjunctivitis are watery eyes with pronounced itching and redness. Systemic allergy medications usually won't provide much relief for ocular allergies, and topical medications designed to specifically target ocular tissue are of great benefit.

Dry eye is a problem in Colorado because of our dry air and our love for the outdoors. It certainly doesn't help that more and more professions require extended periods of computer use which can lead to Computer Vision Syndrome of which dry eye is a key component. Dry eye is too often treated with only artificial tears. While artificial tears can provide relief to some patients, using these drops frequently may be impractical, and not appropriate long-term management of dry eye. Management of chronic dry eye involves determining the type of eye dryness, and treating that form of the disease specifically. Treatment options include tear duct plugs to retain more of your own natural tears, medications that can increase your tear production (such as Restasis® and Xiidra®), use of fish oil supplementation to increase tear quality, topical steroids, Lipiflow (a procedure which can alleviate some types of eye dryness for as long as a year or more) and addressing any lid inflammation or disorders that might be contributing to the dry eye.

Foreign bodies in the eye are dangerous for many reasons. Ocular foreign bodies cause extreme pain and irritation, and the longer they sit in the eye, the more harmful they may cause. For example, metal in the eye, a common injury suffered by machinists and pipefitters, can rust while it is embedded in the cornea. That rust acts to impede proper healing of the eye. Our eye doctors recommend that all ocular foreign body patients be seen as soon as possible to remove the object and clean the area that was affected by the injury. Generally speaking, a foreign body, after it is removed from the eye, will leave an abrasion where the object once sat. This injury will heal the best with use of topical antibiotics, and may even need topical anti-inflammatory medications to prevent permanent scarring.

Lid disorders that can cause a pink or red eye include blepharitis, meibomitis, and misdirected eye lashes. Blepharitis is a chronic infection at the base of the eye lashes and is very common in both adults and children alike. The most common culprit of blepharitis is Staphylococcus which creates a waste product known as an "exotoxin." This exotoxin can cause eye irritation and inflammation (and with these, redness) when it falls down into the eye itself. Blepharitis treatment may require mechanical lid scrubbing, medicated eye washes, and a course of topical antibiotic ointment. Meibomitis is the inflammation, or blockage of the oil glands in the upper and lower lids. These oil glands produce a thin oil layer which floats on top of the tears, preventing the tears from evaporating. For this reason, meibomitis and dry eye are very closely linked –some eye care professionals have even suggested that most dry eye is due to meibomitis. Often times getting the meibomitis under control is important to resolving dry eye symptoms. Misdirected lashes may have to be removed if they rub up against the eye as this can lead to corneal abrasions and eye infections.

If you or your child has a pink or red eye, please call us immediately for a medical eye appointment at **(303) 450-2020**. You can also use the button below to schedule an appointment online. Our eye doctor's schedules are kept flexible in order to accommodate most same-day ocular emergency appointments. We can determine the cause of the redness and effectively treat the problem. Visiting us for a medical reason (such as for a pink or red eye) is considered a medical visit by health insurance and will be billable to your health insurance, usually costing you only a small co-pay (and thus being far less expensive than a visit to the emergency room or to an urgent care center!).

