

Eye Allergy

Definition

- An allergic reaction of the eyes
- Main symptoms are itchy and watery eyes
- Sometimes, the eyes can sting or burn
- The medical name is allergic conjunctivitis

Health Information

Symptoms

- Itchy eyes with frequent rubbing
- Increased tearing (watery eyes)
- Red or pink eyes
- Mild swelling of the eyelids
- No discharge or a sticky, stringy, mucus discharge
- No fever

Causes

- **Pollens** - grass, trees, weeds, molds. Pollens travel in the air.
- **Pets** - cats, dogs, rabbits, horses. Animal allergens get in the eyes from the hands. They can also be in the air.

Care Advice

1. Overview:

- An eye allergy most often is caused by pollen that gets in the eye.
- The eyes can itch, burn or sting.
- All of these symptoms can go away with allergy eye drops.
- Eye allergies are common. They occur in 10% of children.
- Here is some care advice that should help.

2. Wash Allergens Off the Face:

- Use a wet washcloth to clean off the eyelids and face.
- Rinse the eyes with a small amount of warm water. Tears will do the rest.
- Then put a cold wet washcloth on the itchy eye.
- Prevention: Wash the hair every night because it collects lots of pollen.

3. Oral Allergy Medicines:

- If the nose is also itchy and runny, your child probably has hay fever. Hay fever is allergic symptoms of both the nose and eyes.
- Give your child an allergy medicine by mouth. This should get rid of the nose and the eye symptoms. Sometimes eye drops will not be needed.
- Long-acting allergy medicines (such as Zyrtec) are best. No prescription is needed. They have 2 advantages over Benadryl. They cause less sedation. They are also longer-acting and last up to 24 hours.
- Give allergy medicine every day. Do this until pollen season is over (about 2 months for each pollen).

4. **Newer Antihistamine Eye Drops for Pollen Allergies - 1st Choice:**
 - Usually, an oral allergy medicine will control the allergic symptoms of the eye.
 - If the eyes remain itchy and poorly controlled, buy some antihistamine eye drops. No prescription is needed.
 - Dose: 1 drop every 12 hours in both eyes.
 - Ask your pharmacist to suggest a brand. Examples are Patanol, Zaditor or Alaway.
 - For severe eye allergies, using these eye drops every day will help the most. Use them until pollen season is over.
5. **Older Antihistamine/Vasoconstrictor Eye Drops - 2nd Choice:**
 - Often, the eyes will feel much better after the allergic substance is washed out. Also, putting a cold wet washcloth on them usually makes the eyes feel better.
 - If not, this type of eye drop can be used for added relief. No prescription is needed.
 - Ask your pharmacist to suggest a brand. Examples are Naphcon A, Opcon A or Visine A. The A stands for antihistamine.
 - Avoid vasoconstrictor eyedrops without an allergy medicine in them. These are the eye drops without an A in the name, such as plain Visine. Reason: They only treat the redness, not the cause.
 - Dose: 1 drop every 8 hours as needed.
 - Do not use for over 5 days. (Reason: Will cause red eyes from rebound effect)
 - Downside: Doesn't work as well as newer antihistamine eye drops.
6. **Eye Drops - How to Give:**
 - For a cooperative child, gently pull down on the lower lid. Put 1 drop inside the lower lid. Then ask your child to close the eye for 2 minutes. Reason: So the medicine will get into the tissues.
 - For a child who won't open his eye, have him lie down. Put 1 drop over the inner corner of the eye. If your child opens the eye or blinks, the eye drop will flow in. If he doesn't open the eye, the drop will slowly seep into the eye.
 - Lying down is often easier when putting eye drops in your own eyes.
7. **Contact Lenses:**
 - Children who wear contact lenses need to switch to glasses for a while.
 - This will help the eye heal faster.
8. **What to Expect:**
 - If you know the cause of the allergy symptoms, try to avoid it. This is the case with animal allergies. The symptoms will not come back if there is no contact.
 - But, you can't avoid pollens because they are in the air. Most eye allergies continue through the pollen season. They can last 4 to 8 weeks.
9. **Return To School:**
 - Children with pink eyes from an allergy do not need to miss any school.

Call Your Doctor If

- Itchy eyes aren't better in 2 days with allergy treatment
- You think your child needs to be seen
- Your child becomes worse

Pediatric Care Advice

Author: Barton Schmitt MD, FAAP

Copyright 2000-2022 Schmitt Pediatric Guidelines LLC

Disclaimer: This health information is for educational purposes only. You the reader assume full responsibility for how you choose to use it. The information contained in this handout should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. Listing of any resources does not imply an endorsement.