

Medical Alert

CONJUNCTIVITIS (Pink Eye)

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What is it?

Every year we see increased rates of conjunctivitis (sometimes called "pink eye") around the start of the year and during finals. Conjunctivitis is usually caused by infection. Many germs can cause eye infections including bacteria, viruses, and fungi. Conjunctivitis caused by cold viruses is very infectious and can spread rapidly between people. Some infections associated with contact lens wear can be serious and vision-threatening. Conjunctivitis may also be caused by hyper-sensitivity to pollen (hay fever), chemicals, wind, and irritation from make-up. A very common cause here at Pepperdine is related to overuse or improper cleaning of contact lenses.

Symptoms

Symptoms of conjunctivitis include: reddening of the eye, watery eyes, gritty feeling of the eyes and sticky eye discharge. When you get these symptoms, it is best to be seen at the Health Center to rule out other causes such as corneal ulceration, uveitis and foreign body in the eye. Treatment often includes eye drops, either antibacterial or antihistamine depending on the cause.

Prevention

Many cases of conjunctivitis can be prevented by these simple steps:

- Avoid rubbing eyes with unwashed hands.
- Do not share towels.
- Always follow strict hygiene measures with contact lenses and make sure you know how to store them properly. For example, always use fresh cleaning solution each time your lenses are cleaned. NEVER reuse old solution. Do NOT wear lenses any longer than prescribed by your optometrist even if it is finals week!
- When you have a cold or the flu, wash your hands after blowing your nose.