



## Pinkeye (Conjunctivitis)

### What is Pinkeye?

Pinkeye is sometimes called conjunctivitis (*con-junk-tiv-eye-tiss*). It is an infection of the covering of the eyeball and the inside of the eyelid.

Pinkeye is usually caused by a virus, but may also be caused by bacteria, an allergy, air pollution or by rubbing your eyes too much.

Pinkeye is a common childhood disease. If caused by a virus or bacteria, it can spread to other people very easily.

### What does it look like?

Pinkeye usually makes the whites of the eyes turn pink or red. It can cause teary, red, itchy eyes, and the eyelids may be swollen. Pus or thick discharge can make the eyelids sticky, especially when the person sleeps. A cloth dipped in warm water and applied gently to the affected area will help remove any crusty discharge.

### Is pinkeye dangerous?

Pinkeye is a mild infection. It is not a serious threat to health. It will often clear up by itself in 7-10 days.

Sometimes pinkeye can turn into a more dangerous infection. Go to your doctor if symptoms of pinkeye get worse. Your doctor will know if anything is wrong and may prescribe antibiotic eyedrops or ointment.

When your child has pinkeye, your doctor can tell if your child can return to school or daycare, or should stay home (usually for 1-3 days). Your child may need to stay home until an antibiotic has been taken for a full day or until symptoms, such as discharge or pain, get better.

### How is it spread?

This infection spreads very easily. One person with pinkeye can easily infect several family members within a few days. It is often passed on when the person touches the pus or discharge from the eye and then touches someone else. It is also spread by touching someone with the infection and then touching your own eye. An object that touches the discharge (e.g., a tissue, facecloth or eye dropper) and then touches another person's eye or their hand that they may touch their eye with can also spread the infection.

### What can you do?

Pinkeye can be highly infectious so it is important for your child and everyone else in your family to follow strict hygiene practices. These practices should be followed for up to 10 days after pinkeye has been diagnosed or as long as the eye is red.

Here are some good rules to follow:

- Don't rub or touch the infected eye. If only one eye is infected, be extra careful not to touch the other eye. Wash your hands right away after touching the person's eyes or face.

- Wash your hands with soap several times daily.
- Any discharge from an infected eye should be washed out twice a day. Use a damp facial tissue. Wipe outward with a single stroke, starting at the side near the nose. Blot dry with a new tissue. Be careful not to touch the uninfected eye.
- Use paper towels instead of washcloths and towels for washing and drying the hands and face. If you can't do this, make sure others do not use the infected person's cloth towels and face cloths.
- Wash all infected towels, face cloths and bed linens separately from the family's other laundry. Use detergent, the hottest water setting, and dry in a hot dryer.
- A person with pinkeye should not use contact lenses or eye makeup until their eye is free of redness, irritation and any discharge. Throw away all eye make-up that was used when the symptoms first started. Once the infection has gone, make sure the contact lenses and lens case have been carefully cleaned before using them again.
- You should only need one drop at a time. Keep your eye drops in the fridge, so the coolness will let the person know right away if the drop is reaching the eyeball.
- After the drop has been put in, keep the eyelid closed for a minute or two without blinking. This helps the medicine work.
- **Ointment** is harder to put directly onto the eyeball. Instead, put the ointment on the eyelashes. It will eventually melt and reach the eye. This works best when you are trying to put ointment into the eyes of children and they are being fussy.



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## Taking the medicine

If your doctor prescribes antibiotic drops or ointment, here are some tips on how to use them:

- For **eye drops**, gently pull down on the lower eyelid to form a pocket. This will help catch the drops and prevent any being wasted. Another way is to apply the drops right onto the white of the eye. This part of the eye is less sensitive than the pupil and the coloured portion.

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