

Conjunctivitis and Styes

Conjunctivitis

Conjunctivitis, or pinkeye, is an inflammation of the delicate membrane (conjunctiva) that lines the inside of the eyelid and the surface of the eye. It can be caused by bacteria, viruses, allergies, pollution, or other irritants.

The symptoms of pinkeye are redness in the whites of the eyes, red and swollen eyelids, an itching or burning feeling, lots of tears, and a sandy feeling in the eyes. There may be a discharge that causes the eyelids to stick together during sleep.

Prevention

Viral and bacterial conjunctivitis are contagious and spread very easily through contact with the eye drainage. Rubbing an infected eye leaves drainage on your hand, which can spread the infection to your other eye. If you touch an object when you have drainage on your hand, the drainage can transfer to the object, and the virus or bacterium can be spread. Poor hand washing is the main cause of the spread of pinkeye.

The following tips will help to prevent the spread of pinkeye:

- Wash your hands before and after touching your eyes, face, or using medicine in the eyes.
- Do not share towels, handkerchiefs, or washcloths with a person who has pinkeye.
- If a chemical or object gets into your eye, immediately flush it with water. Refer to the index in your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook* to get more information about how to flush your eye with water.

Home treatment

Although most cases of conjunctivitis will clear up in five to seven days on their own, viral pinkeye can last many weeks. People with infectious pinkeye should not attend day care, school, or go to work until symptoms have improved. Pinkeye due to allergies or pollution will last as long as you are exposed to the irritating substance. Good home care should help speed healing and bring relief.

- Apply cold or warm compresses several times a day to relieve discomfort. Use a clean compress for each application.
- When cleaning the eye, wipe from the inside (next to the

nose) toward the outside. Use a clean surface for each wipe so that drainage is not rubbed back across the eye.

- Do not wear contact lenses or eye makeup until the infection is gone. Discard eye makeup after an eye infection.
- If eye drops are prescribed, insert as follows:



Inserting eyedrops

For older children and adults

Pull the lower lid down with two fingers to create a little pouch. Put the drops there. Close the eye for several minutes to let the drops move around.

For younger children

Ask the child to lie down with eyes closed. Put a drop in the inner corner of the eye. When the child opens the eye, the drop will run in.

Be sure the dropper is clean and does not touch the eye, eyelid, or any surface. Eye drops are washed out by normal tearing, so they will need to be replaced at least three times a day.

- Putting antibiotic ointment in the eye can be tricky, especially with children. If you can get it on the eyelashes, it will melt and get into the eye.
- Make sure that any over-the-counter medicine you use is “ophthalmic” (for eyes), not “otic” (for ears).
- Wash your hands thoroughly after treating pinkeye.

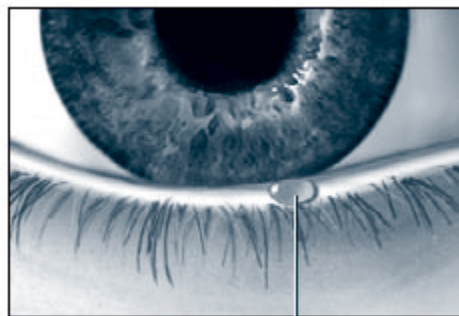
Call Kaiser Permanente if ...

- there is pain in the eye (rather than irritation), blurring, or loss of vision, not cleared even for a moment with blinking
- the eye is painfully sensitive to light
- you feel there is a foreign object in the eye
- the eye is red and there is a thick, greenish-yellow discharge that does not go away in 24 hours
- there is an abnormal difference in size of the pupils
- the problem continues for more than seven days

Styes

A stye is a noncontagious infection of the eyelash follicle. It looks like a small, red bump—much like a pimple—either in the eyelid or on the edge of the lid. It comes to a head and breaks open after a few days.

Styes are very common and are not a serious problem. Most will resolve on their own and do not require removal.



Stye
(small pimple on
margin of eyelid)

Home treatment

- Do not rub the eye, and do not squeeze the stye.
- Apply warm, moist compresses for 10 minutes, 5 to 6 times a day until the stye comes to a head and drains. Wash your hands before applying a compress. Use a clean cloth or piece of gauze moistened with warm water. Do not use hot water, which can cause burns on the eyelid and surrounding areas. Styes respond very well to warm compresses and time.
- Do not wear eye makeup or contact lenses.

Call Kaiser Permanente if ...

- the stye interferes with vision
- the stye gets worse despite your home treatment
- the redness centered on the stye spreads over the entire lid
- a stye becomes very painful, grows larger quickly, or continues to drain

Other resources

- Visit our Web site at www.kp.org.
- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- Call the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone at 1-800-33-ASK ME (1-800-332-7563). For TTY, call 1-800-777-9059.
- Visit your local Health Education Department or Center.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other medical professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have further questions, please consult your doctor.