



EYE ALLERGY INSIGHTS

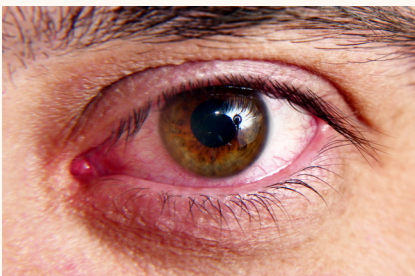


Acting as our windows to the world, our eyes are subject to more than just the visual stimuli in our surroundings, they are also exposed to hazards in the environment. Although our eyes have some excellent protective mechanisms built into their anatomy, they are still vulnerable, not just to injury but also to irritation from environmental, infectious, or artificial substances.

It is not that uncommon to develop a red or bloodshot eye. The truth is that everyone, over the course of a lifetime, will experience one. While red eyes can be the result of such things as eye fatigue, infection, or the over-wearing of contact lenses, for many people they are simply the consequence of allergic reactions.

Also referred to as allergic conjunctivitis or ocular allergy, eye allergies can be annoying and uncomfortable, producing red, itchy, and watery eyes as well as swollen eyelids. As in the case of all allergic reactions, allergic conjunctivitis is triggered when your immune system overreacts to an otherwise harmless substance known as an allergen. Individuals who suffer from eye allergies often have nasal allergies as well.

The most common type of eye allergy by far is seasonal allergic conjunctivitis (SAC), which is typically caused by outdoor allergens such as pollens from grass, trees and weeds, as well as spores from molds.



Perennial allergic conjunctivitis (PAC), on the other hand, occurs year round and is due to allergens that are present in the daily environment regardless of the season. Household allergens that contribute to PAC may include such things as pet dander, feathers in bedding, dust mites, and mold. In addition, irritants, like perfume, smoke or air pollution, cosmetics, and certain medications can also contribute to allergic conjunctivitis. It is also possible to be affected by other types of eye allergies, which can produce additional symptoms as well as further complications for your vision.

Since the symptoms of eye allergies can overlap with those of other eye conditions that can threaten your eyesight, it is imperative to see your eye doctor for an accurate diagnosis. During your visit you may be asked if you or any close members of your family have a history of allergies. As part of a clinical examination your eye doctor will perform some tests, such as examining the eyes with a microscope and checking for the presence of certain types of cells that would indicate an allergic response.

Just like other allergies, managing allergic conjunctivitis involves avoiding allergens that trigger the symptoms. For seasonal allergic conjunctivitis this may mean staying indoors when pollen counts are at their highest, avoiding window fans that draw in the outdoor allergens, and wearing glasses or sunglasses outside. Indoor allergen exposure can be minimized by using mite-proof covers for all types of bedding, keeping humidity low to reduce the development of mold, avoiding contact with some types of indoor pets, and replacing carpeting with hard flooring.

In all cases of eye allergies, rubbing your eyes should be carefully avoided to decrease your risk of making the condition worse or causing an infection. Once diagnosed, treatment for your eye allergy may include various types of eyedrops or medications. If these are not sufficient to control or limit your symptoms, immunotherapy (allergy shots) may also be recommended.

Of course, the most important thing to keep in mind is that proper care for eye allergies, as well as any other conditions affecting your eyes, is of the utmost importance. Making an appointment with your eye doctor is always the best step that you can take to protect the health of your eyes.

