

Common Eye Symptoms

Redness



Conjunctivitis

The surface of the white portion of the eye (the sclera) is covered by a thin translucent tissue called the conjunctiva. In the conjunctiva and beneath it are fine blood vessels that are so small that they are almost invisible to the naked eye. These vessels may dilate, enlarge, and become prominent when the eyes are assaulted by physical or chemical irritants like allergens or toxins.

Infection caused by bacteria or viruses can cause different degrees of redness and is commonly referred to as sore eyes or conjunctivitis. Infectious conjunctivitis is usually accompanied by lid swelling and discharge. Infections of the eyelids (called blepharitis) may spill over to the conjunctiva and also produce the redness and discharge.

Allergic conjunctivitis is characterized by redness, itching, foreign body sensation and watery discharge. Redness and swelling of the lids are also signs of an allergic reaction.

Conjunctival or Subconjunctival Hemorrhage *(see Photo)*

Traumatic injuries to the eye or the surrounding structures can cause bleeding of the conjunctival blood vessels. At times, rupture of these vessels can also occur without any recollection of trauma by the patient. In fact, they can occur without any identifiable cause but many incidents are associated with coughing, straining, or carrying heavy objects.

The blood spreads and clots in the space between the conjunctiva and the sclera. The blood appears bright red the first day in the absence of any other symptoms. The following days, the clot becomes darker red and tends to move downward. Most of the time, the patient may even be unaware of the condition until a companion expresses alarm over the redness. Fortunately, most cases are harmless and disappear after a few days. Repeated events are common either in the same eye or the other eye especially in patients taking blood thinning medications (anticoagulants like Aspirin).

Inflammatory Conditions

Inflammation of eye will also manifest as redness. The inflammation of the external eye (keratitis, scleritis or episcleritis) and the internal eye (uveitis or iritis) will cause a deep reddish purple reaction.

Other eye diseases such as glaucoma and foreign bodies can produce redness too by virtue of the eye's inflammatory response.

Medical Management

Treatment of eye redness depends on the cause. The use of over-the-counter preparations may remove redness and relieve symptoms but does not deal with the underlying condition. Determining the reason for redness should be done through a thorough ophthalmic examination and the appropriate medication prescribed by a competent eye doctor.

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