

Allergic Eye Diseases

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Reference: based on a presentation by Dr. William Dixon, Department of Ophthalmology, University of Toronto at the ALLERGY UPDATE 1994, April 23.



Webmaster note: Due to the age of this article, medications and treatments may have changed. Check with your medical advisor.

There are many allergic eye diseases. The most common is allergic conjunctivitis or ocular hayfever. The cause is an allergic reaction to airborne allergens such as plant pollen. The symptoms are red, itchy, water eyes. The best treatment is the avoidance of the allergen which triggers the reaction. Sometimes a cool compress over the eyes will help. Antihistamines are also helpful. Besides taking antihistamines in a pill form, there are now antihistamine eye drops (Livostin) available by prescription. Cromoglycate (Opticrom) is helpful in controlling eye allergy.

Some rarer allergic eye diseases are:

Atopic Keratoconjunctivitis

This condition affects the eye lids as well as the eyes. It is important to treat this to avoid damage to the cornea. The treatment is the same as for allergic conjunctivitis described above. A topical steroid to help the eye lids is added to the treatment suggestions.

Vernal Conjunctivitis

This is a condition usually seen in children which usually occurs in April – hence its name. The lids develop a rash on the inside which is very itchy and the rash acts like sandpaper on the cornea. Some children rub so much that they lose their eyebrows and eye lashes. The eyes are very light sensitive and there is a heavy discharge. Again the treatment is similar to that for allergic conjunctivitis. Aspirin and cyclosporin are added to relieve symptoms.

Giant Papillary Conjunctivitis

This is seen in contact lens wearers. Its symptoms are very similar to those of Vernal Conjunctivitis, but it is not as itchy. Once the contact lenses are replaced and extra care given to lens and lid hygiene, the condition is well controlled. Opticrom helps to relieve the symptoms.

Contact Allergy

Sometimes substances such as eye medications, eye diagnostics drugs, cosmetics or work related substances can cause allergy of the eye.

It is important that eye problems be thoroughly investigated and correctly treated. If eye allergy occurs, work with an allergist and an ophthalmologist to ensure the best and most effective eye treatment.

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