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# Conjunctivitis

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The more commonly known term for conjunctivitis is red or pink eye. Conjunctivitis is an inflammation of the thin, elastic tissue covering the white portion of the eye. Normally, this structure produces mucus to moisten and protect the eye from irritation and drying. Since blood vessels are the source of nutrition for this tissue which become engorged when the conjunctiva is irritated, the appearance of redness prompts a visit or phone call to the eye doctor.



Sources of irritation causing conjunctivitis include infections (bacteria or viruses), allergies, or environmental irritants (smoke or fumes). With a bacterial infection, an accumulation of white blood cells (pus) will appear in the corners of the eye and itching will be the more common symptom. A viral infection causes watery eyes and may be accompanied by a sore throat and runny nose of the common cold. Because these two types of conjunctivitis can be quite contagious, hand washing once in contact with an affected individual will help prevent an outbreak.

**Alexandria**  
703-931-9100

**Fairfax**  
703-573-8080

**Sterling**  
703-430-4400

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703-858-3170

Unlike the previous types of red eyes, allergies are not contagious but can present in similar ways. Itching is the hallmark symptom and can be soothed with cold-water compresses. Lastly, strong chemical vapors or smoky rooms will compound a dry eye and cause burning and irritation.

Although these are the most common type of red eyes, glaucoma, an ulcer of the eye, or inflammation inside the eye can present with similar signs and symptoms. Therefore, it is always necessary to consult an eye doctor for a prompt medical evaluation if you feel pain, have blurred vision, or are more sensitive to lights.