

Naturopathic Approach to Pink Eye

By Elizabeth Taddiken, ND

School has begun, and many kids will soon start to pick up little illnesses here and there from their school mates. One of those very common illnesses for the preschool and primary school aged kids is Pink Eye, or Conjunctivitis.

What Is It? Pink Eye presents as a reddening of the conjunctiva, which is the thin layer of membrane that lines the white part of the eye and the inside of the eyelid. Some children may feel like there is something stuck in their eye. There may be itching or burning feelings associated, and the eye will appear irritated. Thick white or yellow discharge can often accompany the infection, and may lead to a heavily crusted over eyelid in the morning. There may be swelling of the eyelid, and sensitivity to light.

What Causes Pink Eye?

Pink Eye can be either allergic, bacterial, viral, or from a chemical irritant. Our typical bacterial and viral offenders are the same that trigger the common cold, flu, ear infections, and sore throats. Bacterial and Viral conjunctivitis is contagious and can be spread through coughing and sneezing, touching the hands of an infected person who has been rubbing their eyes or anything they have been touching, or sharing towels with an infected person. Allergic conjunctivitis is usually brought on by typical environmental triggers like pollens, grasses, and animal dander. Irritant conjunctivitis is triggered by chemical irritants like paint fumes, cleaning products, and pool chemicals.

Diagnosis and Naturopathic Treatment?

Diagnosis of conjunctivitis and the type it is will usually be a quick assessment based on the presentation and patient history. When it comes to treatment, as with all naturopathic treatment, we work from the inside-out. We will use homeopathy, hydrotherapy, botanical, and nutritional medicine to bring a patient into a balanced state so the body can do what it needs to control the infection or irritation. Often a single homeopathic remedy is all it takes to clear the infection. There are wonderful botanical eye washes, and compresses that can soothe and clean the eye. Nutritionally, we will be working to boost the immune system with certain vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients. Rarely are antibiotics needed in the case of pink eye, and are often over prescribed for this condition. However, it is important to have a physician assess and monitor the situation if your child's infection is not clearing up in 2-3 days, and especially if you are noticing increased swelling and redness of the eyes and eyelid along with a fever.

How to Prevent Conjunctivitis?

As with so many infectious conditions, one of the best preventive tips you can give to kids is to wash their hands. Especially, when they see other kids in their class with green-yellow goop somewhere on their face! Ensuring pillow cases and towels of the infected child are washed frequently in very hot water. The most important way to prevent conjunctivitis, or any contagious illness for that matter, is to keep up your good health! Eating whole foods, and a wide array of colors. Drinking plenty of clean water, and getting plenty of exercise to help with waste removal. When you are keeping up your health, it makes it much more difficult for these infectious agents to settle in your body.