



How well *do* you see?

About Eye Allergies

What are eye allergies?

Eye allergies affect millions of people each year,¹ and are characterized by an overreaction of the immune system to an allergen through eating, touching or breathing it into the lungs.² Eye allergies are often accompanied by nasal allergy symptoms, such as sneezing and sniffing, but can also occur alone.¹ Allergens are found inside and outside. Grass, tree and wood pollens are the most common outdoor allergens, while the most common indoor allergens include pet hair (dander), dust mites and molds.¹

What are symptoms of eye allergies?

Eye allergies are not harmful to a person's eyes or vision; however, they can cause discomfort.¹ Symptoms can include itchy and red eyes, tearing, burning, blurred vision or increase mucus production.³ Allergic conjunctivitis is an eye allergy that affects the conjunctiva, which is a clear layer of skin overlying the eyes. The most common subtypes of allergic conjunctivitis are seasonal allergic conjunctivitis (SAC), which lasts for a short period of time, and perennial allergic conjunctivitis (PAC), a chronic, year-round condition.³

How are eye allergies diagnosed?

Some people can recover quickly by identifying and avoiding those bothersome allergens that often trigger symptoms.³ An eye care professional (ECP) can also examine the eyes to determine if symptoms are related to an eye infection or allergic conjunctivitis. Eyes can also be examined for signs of allergies, such as swollen blood vessels on the surface of the eye. With severe eye allergies, further testing may have to be done to look for a specific type of white blood cells (called eosinophils), which show up in areas of the eye where there is an allergic reaction to a particular substance.⁴

How do you treat or prevent eye allergies?

The first approach for successful management of allergies should be prevention or avoidance of any allergen that triggers symptoms.¹ Some of these could include:

- Staying indoors when pollen counts are high¹
- Keeping home and car the windows closed¹
- Wearing glasses or sunglasses to prevent pollen from getting into the eyes⁴
- Reducing dust mite exposure in the home by encasing pillows and bedding in "mite-proof" covers¹
- Cleaning floors with a damp rag or mop to trap allergens, rather than dusting or sweeping⁴
- After being around animals, washing hands and changing clothes¹



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- Keeping pets out of the bedroom to avoid exposure to allergens while sleeping¹
- Cleaning high-humidity areas, such as bathrooms, kitchens and basements, regularly to reduce mold; consider using a dehumidifier⁴

Avoiding triggers is not always possible. Short-term allergy relief can include over-the-counter (OTC) eye drops and oral medications, such as artificial tears, antihistamines and decongestants.^{1,4} These may not work for all allergy symptoms and prolonged use could cause worsening conditions.¹

Immunotherapy, or allergy shots, is one long-term option.¹ By injecting a small amount of a specified allergen into the body, a person can become immune to it.⁴ The treatment can take several months, and it's possible that medications might still be needed.¹

Eye drops and oral medications can also be prescribed for long-term treatment, including oral and nasal antihistamines, mast cell stabilizers, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), and corticosteroids.¹

1. American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology, Eye Allergies. <http://www.acaai.org/allergist/allergies/Types/eye-allergies/Pages/default.aspx> [Accessed June 30, 2014]

2. Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, Allergy Facts and Figures. <http://www.aafa.org/display.cfm?id=9&sub=30> [Accessed June 30, 2014]

3. WebMD, Allergies Health Center. <http://www.webmd.com/allergies/guide/eye-allergies-1> [Accessed June 30, 2014]

4. EyeSmart, Eye Allergy Diagnosis. <http://www.geteyesmart.org/eyesmart/diseases/allergies-diagnosis.cfm> [Accessed June 30, 2014]



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