

Eye Problems

Many of the preparations listed in this section are for minor irritations caused by tiredness, dust and so on. Conjunctivitis or "red eye", which is potentially more serious, is an inflammation of the membranes covering the outside of the eye, resulting in a feeling of burning or itching. It may be caused by an allergy, for example to pollen, which is eased by preparations containing antihistamines, or sodium cromoglycate. Sodium cromoglycate is thought to stabilise mast cells, which release histamine in the allergic response.

The presence of a discharge as well as redness, particularly if there is difficulty opening the eyes in the morning, suggests a bacterial infection for which a specific antibacterial agent is indicated. More severe cases should be referred to doctor, particularly if there is pain or sensitivity to light.

Viral conjunctivitis may be herpetic or non-herpetic; in both cases medical attention should be sought. Herpes simplex, which can affect both the eyelids and the eye is a threat to sight so the patient should not self-medicate but see the doctor as soon as possible.

Blepharitis is an inflammation of the eyelids, which appear reddened and thickened along the edge. Treatment in simple cases involves bathing with salt solution to remove the dandruff-like crusts. In unresponsive cases a weak steroid ointment and/or antibiotic may be needed.

A sty is an infection of a single eyelash follicle. Treatment is by bathing with warm water, antibacterial ointments may also help. If crops of styes occur, a course of antibiotics may be needed.

Any eye condition that is not clearing up after 2-3 days of treatment, or is getting worse, should be referred to the doctor.

If there is any sudden pain or blurred vision, the patient should be referred to the doctor as quickly as possible.

Some of the preparations listed are substitute tears, for use if natural tear productions are inadequate. Dry eye is common in the elderly and is often associated with connective tissue diseases such as arthritis.

Contact lens wearers, particularly those with soft lenses, must not use many eye preparations. Check packs for details. Eye drops should usually be discarded within one month of opening.