

# Conjunctivitis in Children: *The Pharmacy Role*

*Conjunctivitis, commonly referred to as pink eye, involves inflammation of the outer layer of the eye and inside of the eyelid. Common causes include viruses, bacteria, allergens, contact lenses, fungi, and certain diseases.*

Viral and bacterial conjunctivitis can spread quickly among young children in daycare and school settings but can also occur in adults. Pharmacists can play an important role in patient education.

Good vision is essential to learning. According to the Association of Optometrists Ireland, all children should have an eye examination with an optometrist as early as possible when they start school.

More and more customers are relying on their local pharmacy when it comes to minor ailments as has been increasingly difficult to visit their GP. As a result of this, patients will have gained a lot of trust in the pharmacy profession and should in future know to turn to their local pharmacist for advice before going to the doctor.

Pharmacists and pharmacy staff need to keep on top of training in areas such as eye health, especially in children and adolescents, so that they can be confident in their ability to recommend certain products and know when to refer on to a GP. This is essential for building up a good rapport with patients, ensuring they will return for your advice in future.

It is important that staff have the confidence to ask appropriate questions to establish the level of discomfort a patient is feeling, how long this issue has been occurring, other medications etc. This will help the staff to know whether they can recommend a product for this issue or whether they need to refer this customer to the pharmacist or the GP to ensure they get appropriate treatment. Any educational information available from the product manufacturers should be taken advantage of.

The key to preventing long term vision problems is early detection. Correcting a child's vision problem before the age of 7 can significantly reduce the risk of having a vision problem for life. If there is a family history of eye sight problems, if a child is having problems in school or parents are worried about their child's vision in any way, advise them to bring them along to their local optometrist and ask about an eye examination.

Always remember that undetected vision problems can cause learning and behavioural problems.

Signs that a child may have a problem with their vision include

- Complaining of not being able to see black/white board or TV
- The eye turning in or out
- Holding things too close to the face
- Frequent Headaches (esp in older children)
- Eye rubbing and blinking
- Reduced attention span at activities
- Avoidance of reading or close work
- Covering one eye or tilting the head
- Difficulty in reading, repeatedly losing place on page
- Poor memory retention of what has been read or studied

## **Conjunctivitis**

Conjunctivitis is the inflammation or infection of the conjunctiva, a thin translucent membrane that covers the anterior surface of the sclera and the

inner surfaces of the eyelids. It acts as a physical barrier to prevent microbes from entering and works to lubricate the eye by secreting mucin from its goblet cells which form a part of the tear film. Conjunctivitis, depending on presenting symptoms can be either allergic or infective.

## **Allergic Conjunctivitis (AC)**

Allergic conjunctivitis can be seasonal or perennial and occurs when the eyes come into contact with an allergen such as pollen, animal dander or dust mites. Symptoms occur in both eyes and include generalised redness which extends to the inner surface of the eyelids. Other symptoms of AC include sore, itchy, watery eyes and swelling of the eyelids. Patients may experience associated symptoms of allergic rhinitis such as a runny or blocked nose and sneezing.

Treatment of AC typically involves the use of OTC eyedrops that contain either an antihistamine or a mast cell stabiliser. Antazoline, an antihistamine is found in combination with xylometazoline, a sympathomimetic that constricts the blood vessels to reduce redness. It is recommended for rapid relief of the initial symptoms of the allergic reaction but not

