

Eye Allergy Facts

- Eye allergies, also known as allergic conjunctivitis, affect millions of Americans. As much as 22 percent of the population has eye allergies.
- Itching is the primary symptom of eye allergies. Other symptoms may include redness, tearing, burning, blurred vision, a scratchy feeling in the eye, swelling or redness of the inner eyelids, sensitivity to light, and a sensation that something is in the eye.
- Eye allergies can occur alone, or they may accompany nasal allergy symptoms, such as runny, itchy nose, nasal congestion or headache.
- Almost three-quarters (73 percent) of allergy patients who take medication also suffer from allergy eyes.
- As with other allergic conditions, eye allergies develop when the body's immune system becomes sensitized and overreacts to something that is ordinarily harmless. The reaction occurs whenever the offending allergen, which is often airborne, comes into contact with the eyes.
- Allergens present indoors or outdoors can cause eye allergies.
- The most common outdoor airborne allergens are grass, tree and weed pollens. People who are sensitive to these allergens suffer from seasonal allergic conjunctivitis, the most common type of eye allergy.
- Pet hair or dander, dust mites and molds are the most common indoor allergens. Indoor allergens can trigger symptoms year-round, resulting in perennial allergic conjunctivitis.
- Prevention or avoidance of the allergens that trigger symptoms should be the first step for successful management of eye allergies. Treatment options include cold compresses, tear substitutes, and eye drops and oral medications, which are available over-the-counter and by prescription.
- Allergy shots or immunotherapy is another option for relieving eye allergies if avoidance, oral medication and eye drops do not control symptoms.
- Over-the-counter eye drops containing topical decongestants or vasoconstrictors should not be used for more than a few days. Prolonged use of the drops can lead to increased swelling and redness that may last even after discontinuing the drops. This is called a "rebound effect."
- Over-the-counter generic KETOTIFEN and similar newer prescription eye drops (like Patanol, Optivar, and others) provide both short- and long-term targeted relief of eye allergy symptoms, and they can be used to manage eye allergy symptoms in conjunction with an oral antihistamine that might be taken to manage nasal allergy symptoms. These types of eye drops DO NOT lead to the rebound effect.
- Ask your pharmacist if you are not sure which type of eye drop is safe to use regularly.

Source: American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology