

Lifting the lid on allergic eye disease

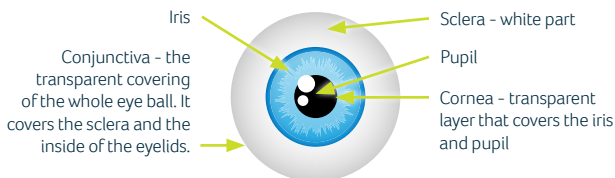
All about allergic eye disease and how to manage it





Can allergy affect the eyes?

> **Yes, and it is often called allergic conjunctivitis. Conjunctivitis is the name given to the inflammation of the mucous membrane covering the surface of the eyeball – the conjunctiva.**



This inflammation is caused by an allergen landing on the surface of the eye or transferred up from nasal symptoms. The difference between allergic conjunctivitis and allergic eye disease is that allergic eye disease involves the conjunctiva and other eye tissues, for example the cornea.

It is more likely to occur if you or your family have allergic diseases such as hay fever, eczema or asthma.

> **What symptoms should I look out for?**



Which allergens can cause this?

➤ **Common allergens are grass, weed or tree pollens. These symptoms can be seasonal and part of overall ‘hay fever’ symptoms. They can also be caused by allergens that are present all year round (perennial) such as house dust mite or pet allergens.**

A person can become sensitised by exposure to an allergen. If they develop symptoms like those shown when they are exposed to the same allergen again, they are said to be allergic to that particular allergen.

It is very important to control symptoms and in particular, not to rub the eyes as this could cause infection.



Treatment

Anti-allergy eye drops need to be used every day. Some people need drops only for a few weeks in hot weather, some need them during the whole spring and summer, while others need them all year round.

If there is eczema on the eyelid skin, it may be suggested that a cream or ointment is used to treat this.

A person's sight can be affected if eyes are very inflamed or the cornea is affected and stronger drops, such as those with steroids, may be prescribed. Remember that all medicines should be used exactly as prescribed for the best result.

Rarer types of allergic eye disease

Rarer, but more serious, types of allergic eye disease which can threaten sight are **Vernal Keratoconjunctivitis (VKC)** and **Atopic Keratoconjunctivitis (AKC)**.

VKC occurs in children, especially boys, and AKC occurs in both children and adults. The conditions are very similar to eczema but affect the eyelid and conjunctiva. Children may often (though not always) grow out of VKC at puberty, but AKC may last for years or even a lifetime.

VKC and AKC are closely associated with allergy and a person affected often has other allergic conditions such as asthma, eczema or hay fever.

Both conditions need to be treated under the care of an eye specialist (ophthalmologist) who has experience in managing these potentially very serious eye diseases which involve the entire eye surface.

Symptoms can include soreness, itching, redness of the eyes and eyelids, blurry vision, a thick stringy mucous discharge and the presence of small lumps, known as cobblestone papillae, under the eyelid.

Always ask your optician to check if you are unsure (do not lift the eyelid yourself) and if necessary, obtain a referral to an ophthalmologist.

> How do the symptoms of VKC and AKC differ from the usual allergic eye disease?

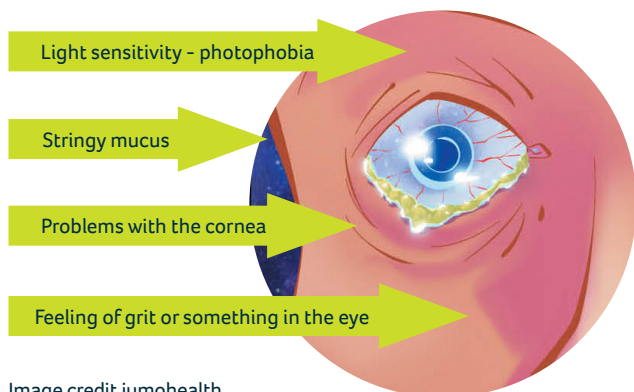


Image credit jumohhealth

If you or your child has symptoms indicating allergic eye disease, talk to your GP

Here are some things you may want to think about before you visit your GP:

1. Write down all your questions and list the symptoms and when they occur
 2. Take pictures of eyes to show the problem when the symptoms are present
 3. Take any medication with you that you have tried.
-

Take the opportunity to:

1. Ask questions
 2. Discuss worries and concerns about your (or your child's) condition
 3. Ask about long term outcomes and the medications that can help
 4. Check how long you should leave it before going back to your GP if the medication does not help.
-

If treatment or advice do not control the symptoms you should discuss a referral to:

- An allergist/immunologist or paediatrician if it is allergic conjunctivitis
- An ophthalmologist if VKC or AKC is suspected

Where can I find more information?

Visit allergyuk.org for our allergic eye disease resources:

- Vernal Keratoconjunctivitis information page
- Sam and Tracey's story (video)
- Allergic Eye Disease Factsheet

Key messages from Allergy UK

Healthy eyes are important for maintaining your vision.

If you think you are affected by itchy eyes caused by allergy, get advice from your GP (or pharmacist) as soon as possible.

VKC and AKC are very rare conditions. They require highly specialist help, diagnosis and treatment. If you suspect you or your child has the symptoms described in this leaflet, consult your GP as soon as possible and discuss referral to an ophthalmologist.



For more help, contact the Allergy UK Helpline:

9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

01322 619 898 **www.allergyuk.org**



/allergyuk



@allergyUK1

The content of this leaflet was written and developed by Allergy UK.
This leaflet has been produced with the help of a grant from Santen.

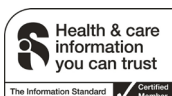
It is not medical advice. It has been developed to raise awareness of this condition which you need to discuss with your GP.

Reviewed by: Dr. Annegret Dahlmann-Noor (PhD, FRCOphth, FRCS(Ed), DipMedEd)
and Professor Roger J. Buckley BM BCh MA PhD FRCS FRCOphth HonFCOptom

Date of preparation: July 2019

Allergy UK, Planwell House, LEFA Business Park,
Edgington Way, Sidcup, Kent, DA14 5BH

Allergy UK is the operational name of the British Allergy Foundation, a charitable company limited by guarantee and registered in England and Wales. Charity No: 1094231. Company No: 4509293.
Registered in Scotland - Charity No: SC039257



Registered with
**FUNDRAISING
REGULATOR**

