



Contributed Article

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SOOTHE THOSE RED, TEARY, ALLERGY-EFFECTED EYES

Are you sneezing? Are your eyes watery and red? Oregon has some of the highest grass and pollen counts in the nation during the summer months.

Throughout the U.S., 20 percent of adults and children suffer from allergies. It's the sixth leading cause of chronic disease in the United States.

If you're an allergy sufferer, you might have conjunctivitis, which is an inflammation of the thin, transparent layer that lines the inner eyelid and covers the white part of the eye.

Luckily, itchy, watery eyes caused by tree, grass, and pollen allergies are not something that you just have to live with.

You might try using a cold compresses which can give you almost immediate relief from itching and can reduce the severity of symptoms for hours. Be sure to use a pliable compress, like one kept in the freezer. Wrap it in a thin towel and apply to your closed eyes for several minutes.

If that's not giving you enough relief, be sure to see your eye doctor. Your optometric physician can soothe your conjunctivitis with prescription or over-the-counter eye drops. Drops range from over the counter homeopathies which build your eye's immunity to allergens, to prescription medication, to decongestants. Just be aware that decongestants can constrict the blood vessels and whiten the eye, which can actually increase redness and irritation if used too often.

If you wear contact lenses, airborne allergens can stick on your lenses making you uncomfortable. Allergens can also cause your eyes to over-produce natural substances which bind to your contacts. You can use lubricant eye drops to relieve your symptoms and keep your contact lenses clean. However, if you are using "anti-allergy" eye drops you should know those are not compatible with most contact lenses. So if you use anti-allergy eye drops, allow 15 minutes to pass before you insert your contact lenses.

Another option is to use daily disposable contact lenses, and discard them nightly. When lenses are replaced each day, irritating deposits cannot build up over time.

Treating your red, itching eyes is not a one-size-fits-all approach. There are many factors that go into getting the right treatment for your specific symptoms. When you visit your eye doctor, be sure to describe your symptoms so he or she can prescribe a topical medication that safely and effectively relieves your symptoms and lets you see clearly this summer.

Michelle Monkman is an optometric physician in Pendleton and a member of the Oregon Optometric Physicians Association. For more information, visit www.oregonoptometry.org.