

Michael W. Schwartz, O.D.

853 NE A Street Grants Pass, OR 97526
docschwartz.com 541-474-2788

SOOTHE THOSE RED, TEARY, ALLERGY-AFFECTED 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. This inflammation can trigger itching, excess watering, or whitish mucus accumulation in the eyelashes and elsewhere.

Luckily, itchy, watery eyes caused by tree, grass, and pollen allergies are not something that you just have to live with. For example, many allergy sufferers benefit from the use of cold compresses. A very cold but pliable compress, such as those kept in the freezer, is the key. Wrap it in a thin towel and apply to your closed eyes for several minutes. This can give almost immediate relief from itching and can reduce the severity of allergy symptoms for hours.

Many times, allergy-related conjunctivitis can be soothed with prescription or over-the-counter eye drops. Drops range from over the counter homeopathics (for building your eye's immunity to allergens; a common trade name is Similisan Allergy) to decongestants (like Visine) to prescription antiallergy agents. However, decongestants contain an agent to constrict the blood vessels and whiten the eye. This can actually increase redness and irritation if used too often. Personally, I endorse over the counter eyedrops such as Alaway or Zaditor, two products which rival prescription quality drops in effectiveness but are priced much lower.

If you wear contact lenses, airborne allergens can stick on your lenses causing you discomfort. Allergens can also stimulate excessive production of natural substances in your eyes which bind to your contacts and increase discomfort. Lubricant eye drops can help relieve your symptoms and keep your contact lenses clean. But antiallergy drops are not compatible with most contact lenses, and so if you wear contacts you should allow 15 minutes after the use of the drops 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. So 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.