

# RED EYES

Eyes appear red when something causes blood vessels in the membrane covering the white of the eye to swell. This means that more blood flows to the area making it look red and feel hot. Red eyes happen with a wide range of eye problems. Some are minor, while others are serious and can threaten sight.

**Signs and symptoms** of the more common red eye conditions:

Condition	Symptoms	Possible causes
Irritated (chemical or toxic conjunctivitis)	Itching, tears, eyes sometimes feel gritty.	Dust, tobacco smoke, pool chlorine, tiredness, excess alcohol, rubbing eyes, sunlight.
Allergy eyes (allergic conjunctivitis)	Irritation and itching, watery eyes, no pain or pus. Often accompanied by wheezing, sneezing or skin rash.	Allergens in the air (often pollens) or allergy to cosmetics.
Infected eyes (infectious conjunctivitis)	Bacterial - eyes stuck together on waking, pus, eyes gritty and burning but no pain. Viral - pain and very watery, but little pus.	Viruses or bacteria.
Dry eyes (See Dry Eyes Fact Card)	Burning, gritty sensation, feeling of something in the eye. Stringy discharge.	Not enough tears being made, ageing, some medicines, some medical conditions.

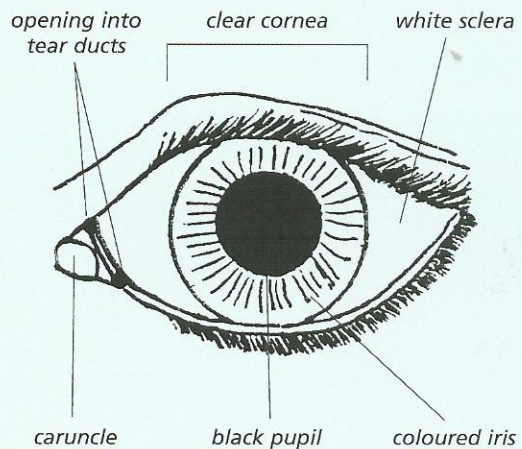
## Important

Red eyes can be a warning sign of serious eye disorders. If you have red eyes and any of the following, see a doctor urgently:

- Discomfort in bright light
- Blurred vision
- Loss of vision
- Redness immediately around the iris (see diagram) rather than over the whole white of the eye
- Pain or tenderness (rather than itching or burning)
- Nausea and vomiting.

Also see a doctor if you have:

- Redness in one eye only
- A red eye which does not settle within 24 hours
- A cold with a clear discharge from the eyes that does not settle within a few days
- Discharge of pus.



## Treatment of simple red eye

- Rest the eyes and avoid bright light.
- Apply a cold compress to the eye/s.
- Vasoconstrictor eye drops may help to relieve burning and stinging (ask a pharmacist).
- Only use vasoconstrictor eye drops for a few days at a time or the redness may get worse (ask a pharmacist).
- Do not use vasoconstrictor eye drops if susceptible to chronic open-angle glaucoma (ask a doctor).
- Air conditioning and heating can make eyes dry (see *Dry Eyes* Fact Card). If eyes are dry, 'artificial tears' can help (ask a pharmacist). If drops do not relieve dry eye after three days, see a doctor.

## Self care

- Wear goggles in chlorinated pools or dirty water.
- Wear sunglasses on bright sunny days e.g. at the snow, at the beach, when driving (ask your pharmacist).
- Try not to rub the eyes, especially if they are already irritated.
- Do not use an eye product that was used by or prescribed for someone else.
- Limit your alcohol intake.
- Stop smoking (see *Smoking* fact cards).
- Ask for non-smoking sections of restaurants and in the work place.
- Try to identify and avoid anything you are allergic to.
- Organisms can grow in eye products once they are opened. Throw out eye drops and ointments 28 days after opening, unless otherwise advised by a pharmacist.



Your **Self Care** Pharmacist

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## Using eyedrops

1. Wash hands.
2. Tilt head back.
3. Pull down lower lid.
4. Look up and drop in one drop. For ointments, squeeze in about 5mm. Do not let the dropper or tube touch the eye.
5. Close eye gently for a few minutes.
6. With the end of finger, put gentle pressure over the inner corner of the eye (tear duct). Hold for a few minutes. This will help keep the drop in the eye.
7. Instil second drop if prescribed (wait about 3-4 minutes after the first drop to avoid washing it out of the eye).

For children, close eye gently, put drops on inner corner of eye near nose. Tell child to open eyes while tilting head to the side – drops will run in across the eye.



## Other relevant fact cards

- *Smoking*
- *Dry Eyes*
- *Hay fever*
- *Sinus Problems*

## Contact

**A doctor or ophthalmologist** – listed under 'medical practitioners' in the yellow pages of the phone book

**A Self Care pharmacy** – to locate telephone 1300 369 772 and ask for the Pharmacy Self Care Field Officer.

In case of poisoning, phone the **Poisons Information Centre** on 13 11 26 from anywhere in Australia.

Pharmacists are medicines experts. Ask a pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.

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