

What are eye allergies?

An eye allergy is an allergic reaction to an allergic substance on the surface of the eye. With an eye allergy, your child will have:

- itchy eyes (your child may frequently rub them)
- increased tearing
- red or pink eyes (without pus)
- mild swelling of the eyelids.

What is the cause?

Eye allergies that occur during the same season each year are caused by pollens. Pollens from trees, grasses, and weeds are invisible and travel in the air. Allergies that are not seasonal may be caused by pets (for example, cats), feathers, perfumes, eye makeup, or another substance. The things that cause allergies are called allergens.

How long does it last?

Most eye allergies caused by a pollen last 4 to 6 weeks, which is the length of most pollen seasons. If the allergic substance can be identified (for example, a cat) AND avoided, the symptoms will not return.

How can I take care of my child?

Remove pollen. First wash the pollen off the face. Then use a clean washcloth and cool water to clean off the eyelids. (Tears will wash the pollen out of the eyes.) This rinse of the eyelids may need to be repeated every time your child comes in on a windy day. Pollen also collects in the hair and on exposed body surfaces. This pollen can easily be reintroduced into the eyes. Therefore, give your child a shower and shampoo every night before bedtime. Encourage your child not to touch his eyes unless his hands have been washed recently.

Antihistamine/Vasoconstrictor Eyedrops. Usually, the eyes will feel much better after the pollen is washed out and a cold compress (for example, a cold washcloth) is applied. If they are still itchy or bloodshot, your child may need antihistamine eyedrops that you can buy without a prescription. Zaditor or Alaway are the most effective OTC antihistamine eyedrops. Use 1 drop every 12 hours throughout the pollen season.

Oral antihistamines. If these measures aren't effective, your child probably also has hay fever (that is, allergic symptoms of the nose) and your child needs an oral antihistamine. The following antihistamines are OTC: Benadryl and chlorpheniramine products work for 8 hours. Zyrtec and Claritin products work for 24 hours. Give the correct dosage as listed on the product. They need to be taken on a daily basis until pollen season is over. This will control both the nose and eye symptoms.

How can eye allergies be prevented?

Some suggestions to reduce exposure to allergens are:

- Keep your child's bedroom windows shut and use central air conditioning during spring, summer, and fall pollen seasons. If a room air conditioner is used, recirculate the indoor air rather than pulling outside air indoors. Air purifiers can be helpful if filters are kept clean. HEPA (high efficiency particulate air) filters are best. Wash or change air filters once a month.
- Your child should shower, shampoo, and change clothes right after working or playing outside during allergy season.
- Your child should not be outdoors when the lawn is being mowed.
- Your child should wash his hands immediately after any contact with a pet.
- Symptoms depend on how high the pollen count is that day. You can get your daily pollen count from <http://www.pollen.com>. Just type in your zip code.

When should I call my child's healthcare provider?

Call during office hours if:

- This treatment and an antihistamine do not relieve most of the symptoms in 2 or 3 days.
- You have other concerns or questions.