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Red Eye:

Common Problems in Primary Care

INTRODUCTION

Red eye is one of the most common ophthalmology problems seen in primary care. It is often caused by a benign condition that is self-limiting. It may, however, be the sign of a more serious condition that requires emergency care. A detailed patient history and focused physical examination can facilitate diagnosis and appropriate management.

OBJECTIVES

This module will enable clinicians to:

- Diagnose and manage common causes of red eye in primary care using an evidence-based approach where possible.
- Identify red flags and the need for referral in patients presenting with red eye.

Note: For each case, we have provided photographs that illustrate similar, though not exact, presentations. It may help group members if they print this module in colour.

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CASES

Case 1: Peter, age 35

Peter, a nursery school teacher, comes to your surgery complaining of redness and irritation of his right eye.

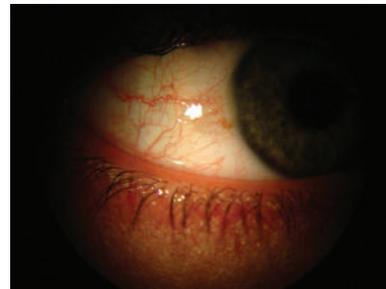


Photo courtesy of Dr. R. Teeple

These symptoms started about two days ago and he noticed today that his left eye seems to be getting red as well. He has also noticed that his right eyelids are stuck together in the morning.

What additional history and findings on examination would be important?

Part Two

Peter has no photophobia or significant eye pain, and has not noticed any change in his visual acuity or any visual haloes. He describes a moderately purulent discharge especially in the morning. He does not describe any itchiness of his eye or other allergic symptoms. There is no history of ocular trauma or foreign body. He doesn't wear contact lenses. He has no coexisting autoimmune or inflammatory disorders and does not have any systemic symptoms such as fever, skin or mucosal lesions, joint stiffness, nausea or vomiting, headache or genitourinary discharge. He is on no medications and is otherwise healthy, although he tells you he is just getting over a nasty cold.