

PRESS RELEASE

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Poor Air Quality Exacerbates Eye Allergy Rubbing Itchy Eyes May Be Damaging

Eye allergy is on the rise in Hong Kong, partly due to the deterioration of air quality. Patients with early eye allergy symptoms such as itching, redness, dryness, and tear, have doubled from 10% to 30% in the past decade!

Eye allergy is closely connected to other forms of allergy. Over seven out of every ten patients with other forms of allergy also have eye allergic symptoms!

Itchy eye is a common symptom. Patients tend to rub their eyes to sooth the itchy feeling. Doctor says it would increase the chance of viral and bacterial infections that may bring permanent damage to the eyes. The government hospitals recently reported that, on average, several cases of slackening of the eye lid muscle due to rubbing happen in a year. Surgery is usually required to fix the problem.

Eye allergy affects patient's life in different ways. The Hong Kong University Public Opinion Programme (HKUPOP) ran a survey in February 2007, and successfully interviewed 508 patients with eye allergy symptoms. Dr. Robert Chung, Director of HKUPOP, presented the survey findings in today's press conference.

Around 90% of respondents feel itchy or painful

- Respondents consider "air pollution", "insufficient sleep" and "long working hours" are the key factors of eye allergy; while 73% think air pollution aggravates eye allergy.
- 22% of respondents appear to have eye allergy symptoms from several times a day to once several days; 83% reflect that eye allergy affects their work efficiency; 65% cannot work on their computer continuously.
- Eye allergy also affects patient's quality of life: 78% of respondents cannot watch television, work on computer, or read books for a long time; 36% cannot wear any make-ups or contact lenses; 30% consider their driving is affected.
- Eye allergy has a negative impact on patient's psychological state: 55% of respondents want to stay at home; 43% worry about being misunderstood by others (e.g. being perceived as crying or sick); 39% feel a loss of attractiveness; 34% want to stay aloof.
- In the emotional side, 66% of respondents feel tired; 46% feel annoyed; 33% feel grumpy.
- Respondents treat their eye allergy symptoms by keeping their eyes closed for a short rest, putting eye drops, or rubbing their eyes.

Dr. Y. W. Kenneth Kwan, experienced ophthalmologist, said that eye allergy has the same itching symptom as other forms of allergy. Patients tend to rub their eyes to sooth the itchy feeling, which may bring infections, or and make it even worse. It may also slacken the eyelid muscle that bring permanent damage to the eyes. Dr. Kwan reminds patients that they should use eye drops dedicated for treating eye allergy instead of rubbing their eyes.

Higher risk for those with family history

Eye allergy, or allergic conjunctivitis, is an allergy disease of which the patient's conjunctiva is triggered by an allergen and produces a chain of allergic reactions as a result. Eye allergy is not contagious, yet the patient would feel the symptoms of itching, redness, tears, and pain within a short period of time. Those with family history of other forms of allergy such as eczema and asthma have a higher chance of suffering from eye allergy. The most common forms of eye allergy are seasonal and perennial. In Hong Kong, quite many patients have perennial eye allergy due to the deterioration of air quality, which jeopardizes their quality of life.

With regard to treatment, Dr. Kwan said that the key is to identify the allergens and avoid making contact with them. However, as the air contamination in Hong Kong is so severe, and the air-borne pollutants are almost everywhere, it's difficult to escape from them. Thus, getting an on-targeted therapy is important.

Effective treatment must target the mass cell of human eyes

Traditional therapies for eye allergy mainly contain anti-histamine which can relieve the itchy symptom promptly. However, as these therapies do not inhibit the mediator that causes inflammation, they cannot prevent eye allergy. As such, patients have to worry when the next incidence of eye allergy would happen.

Dr. Kwan said that the most effective therapy of eye allergy should target the human conjunctiva mast cell, the source of the allergy reaction. Ideally, the therapy should be able to inhibit the H1-receptor and stabilize the human conjunctiva mass cell concurrently.

New therapy that prevents eye allergy

The breakthrough of the new generation of eye allergy therapy, olopatadine, lies in its unique dual functions: It inhibits the H1-receptor and stabilizes the human conjunctiva mass cell at the same time. With those functions, olopatadine can relieve the eye allergy symptoms promptly and enduringly. As it can prevent eye allergy, it relieves the worry of the patient.

Dr. Kwan said, "Eye allergy is a common topical allergic disease. Systemic therapies for other allergy diseases may not applicable to eye allergy. Patients should choose the right therapy in order to improve their quality of life."

About olopatadine

Olopatadine is an eye drop dedicated to treating eye allergy. Through the selective inhibition of H1-receptor and stabilization of the human conjunctiva mast cell from releasing histamine, it can stop the eye allergy symptoms promptly.

A clinical study of 28 centers and 2,587 patients has revealed that, olopatadine can control the seasonal allergy symptoms effectively. It provides speedy and lasting symptoms relief, better efficacy and a higher level of comfort than other eye allergy therapies. Olopatadine is proven safe for patients aged 3 or above. The side effects of olopatadine are minimal which include minor discomfort in eye (0.9%) and headache (0.4%).

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