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ABSTRACT: Treatment options in ocular allergy

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Allergy symptoms that affect the eyes are common in adults and children worldwide, and are often associated with nasal allergy symptoms, prompting the term 'rhinoconjunctivitis' to describe the condition.

The more severe forms of ocular allergy are not only distressing, but can also threaten a patient's vision. Each type of ocular allergy is associated with ocular redness, itching and tearing; however, AKC and VKC can threaten the cornea.

A variety of treatment options exist to control ocular allergy symptoms.

Nonpharmacologic options include allergen avoidance, lubrication and rinsing with saline.

Recommended treatments for symptoms of allergic conjunctivitis — namely, ocular itching and redness with tearing, and accompanying nasal congestion — include topical mast cell stabilisers, multiple action agents and topical antihistamines (with and without a vasoconstrictor).

Systemic antihistamines can be used, these usually being reserved for those with atopic symptoms affecting other organ systems. They may lead to exacerbation of dry eye so should be recommended with ocular lubricants.

Refractory cases and those with more serious sight-threatening atopic conditions, such as vernal and atopic keratoconjunctivitis, may require treatment with topical steroids or immunomodulatory agents, although this is usually administered under specialist supervision.

Recent evidence suggests that nasal allergy treatments applied topically to the nose may also improve ocular allergy symptoms, which raises the interesting possibility that a parasympathetic nasal-ocular neural reflex pathway may be involved in the stimulation of allergic responses in the eye.

For selected patients, allergen-specific immunotherapy is also an option. Newer forms of this such as SLIT have revealed good symptom control for ocular symptoms.

Dry eye often occurs with allergic conjunctivitis and requires management according to its severity.

Ocular allergy symptoms are often underdiagnosed and cause a significant impact on the life of the patient. It is vital to reach a better understanding of ocular allergic mechanisms and inflammation, which may lead to improved treatment.