

Understanding Eyelid Swelling

Recurrent or chronic eyelid swelling, medically known as eyelid edema (ee-deem-ah), can have numerous causes, and treatment depends upon making an accurate diagnosis.

Recognizing Eyelid Swelling

Indicators of Eyelid Swelling:

- red and/or translucent eyelid skin
- swelling of the conjunctiva (clear outer covering of the eyeball), giving a glassy or watery-eyed appearance
- bags/dark circles under the eyes, especially first thing in the morning and especially following increased salt or alcohol consumption the night before
- upper eyelashes turned downwards
- fine, vertical wrinkles in the eyelid skin, especially starting near the edge of the eyelid near the eyelashes

Information Which Can Be Very Helpful in Determining the Cause of Eyelid Swelling

- Comprehensive list of all medications and supplements, including skin creams and eye drops and ointments, along with when the medications were started
- Comprehensive list of all medical conditions
- Careful observation of when the swelling started, frequency and duration of occurrence, times of the day when it is worse, and effect of travel away from home
- Presence or absence of itching, rashes, or redness
- History of snoring or sleep apnea
- History of dermal fillers

Some Specific Causes of Chronic or Recurrent Eyelid Edema

Medications

Many medications can cause eyelid swelling, and the problem may develop immediately or after many years of use. Perhaps the most insidious are medications which are generally used to decrease inflammation and swelling in other parts of the body, such as corticosteroids ("steroids"), acetaminophen (Tylenol), aspirin, and other non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications such as Motrin, Ibuprofen, Advil, etc. However, other types of medications are more likely culprits. An on-line search will uncover complications of nearly all medicines. To determine whether eyelid swelling is the result of a particular medication, under a doctor's supervision consider stopping the medication for two weeks. Eyelid swelling is not an uncommon side effect of many medications, and an additive effect can be particularly problematic to sort out.

Allergies

One of the most common reasons for eyelid swelling is an allergy. Classic signs are itching swollen eyelids, swelling of the conjunctiva, watery eyes and sometimes a scaly rash. Allergies due to the environment are usually bilateral, may be seasonal and are frequently combined with a host of other symptoms like runny nose, sneezing, and nasal congestion. Swelling around one eye, usually on the dominant handed side is most often due to a contact dermatitis from something that has been touched. Cosmetics like hair dyes, nail polish, perfumes, makeup and eye shadows may also cause eyelid swelling. Additionally, eye drops, contact solutions, and eye ointment may have ingredients, most of the preservative which may cause an allergic reaction. Repeated exposure to an allergen may cause a thickening of the thin eyelid skin. Hives, of course, indicate a much more abrupt and dangerous form of allergy. Autoimmune disorders, heat, cold, and pressure can all also contribute to hives and be causes of recurrent eyelid edema. To identify a trigger, keep a diary of food and exposures and visit an allergist for testing.

Ocular Rosacea

Rosacea is a common, chronic condition that affects patients of all ages, but typically presents itself between ages 30 and 60. The most common areas affected are the cheeks, nose, chin and forehead. There is debate as to the specific cause of rosacea, but most agree that it nearly always results in some degree of posterior eyelid swelling and eventually causes dry eyes. Dry eye caused by rosacea can be serious condition requiring complex and meticulous management. In addition, people with Rosacea often also demonstrate prolonged swelling after local surgery. Treatment for rosacea is complex and meticulous, but manageable.

Thyroid Eye Disease

Thyroid Eye Disease (TED) commonly causes eyelid, conjunctiva, and orbital swelling. In a person with rapid development of eyelid swelling, especially in the lower eyelids, TED should be strongly considered.

Melkersson Rosenthal Syndrome

Melkersson Rosenthal Syndrome (MRS) is a rare condition that often includes variations of facial paralysis and swelling and a furrowed tongue. The paralysis may be intermittent, and the eyelid swelling may be the only symptom of facial swelling. Usually the symptoms come and go, but eventually become constant. Diagnosing MRS can be difficult because the findings are easily confused with other ailments. Treatment for MRS is aimed at treating the symptoms with variations of steroids, but eyelid surgery remains a good option for these patients.

Floppy Eyelid Syndrome

Floppy Eyelid Syndrome is an acquired condition affecting mostly the upper eyelids. There is usually some eyelid thickening and swelling, and eyelid skin may become paper-thin from repeated inflammation. Sometimes the eyelids flip inside-out while sleeping, and bedding may then rub directly against the eye causing severe morning eye irritation. Floppy Eyelid Syndrome is associated with sleep apnea, obesity, diabetes, hypertension and other eye disorders. Though complex, surgical treatment aims at reducing the extra eyelid skin and stretched out eye tissue.

C1-Esterase Inhibitor Deficiency-Type Angioedema

A hereditary condition, angioneurotic edema is rare and caused by a genetic deficiency of C1 esterase inhibitor activity that only affects the eyelids. This condition is present in childhood, worsens during puberty, and is characterized by episodic eyelid swelling, but intestinal and laryngeal swelling may also develop. Abdominal pain, diarrhea, and urinary retention might occur. Type I (more common) is a true deficiency of C1-INH protein, while Type II has a dysfunctional protein. There are also two types of Type I C1-INH deficiency. Type Ia is associated with lymphoproliferative disorders. Type Ib is characterized by the presence of autoimmune antibodies against C1-INH. To diagnose this group of disorders, the C1-INH level, C4, and C1-INH activity must be determined.

Blepharochalasis

Perhaps the rarest cause of eyelid swelling, Blepharochalasis is a disorder with symptoms of painless non-pitting eye swelling starting in adolescence and becoming less frequent with time. Sometimes these attacks are brought on by physical or emotional stress. Repeated attacks can lead to paper-thin eyelid skin, changes in the shape of the eyes, and drooping upper eyelids.

Whole Body Edema

Whole body edema (swelling) usually presents initially in the eyelids. Many disorders contribute to whole body edema and vary in their degree of medical severity and concern. Heart, liver, and kidney disease can all cause whole body swelling, as well as lymphatic obstruction, severe nutritional deficiencies, some malignancies, and hypothyroidism. Tell-tale sign of whole body edema is eyelid swelling that is the worst upon awakening and leg swelling with pitting-edema that develops throughout the day.

For more information on eyelid swelling, see a more comprehensive article by Dr. Soparkar, and associates at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2884828/>