

- Air pollution

PROTECT YOUR EYES FROM POLLUTION

Experts suggest how to From conjunctivitis to dry eye syndrome, combat ill effects of hazardous toxic air

HT City · 25 Nov 2021 · 07 · Swati Chaturvedi swati.chaturvedi@hindustantimes.com

Pollution levels in Delhi-NCR have been alarming since the onset of the festive period, owing to a combination of factors such as vehicular pollution, burning of firecrackers and stubble burning in neighbouring states, etc. According to a recent study, the air quality in NCR is as bad as smoking 40 cigarettes a day. And, prolonged exposure to this polluted air has a catastrophic impact on all organs of our body, including the eyes. Cases of dry eye, watering, burning sensation, blurred vision and even glaucoma are being reported on a regular basis.



“The eye, being one of the most sensitive organs, is continually exposed to the toxic environment, posing a significant risk to eye health and eyesight in general,” says Dr Saumya Sharma, senior consultant at Sharp Sight Eye Hospitals.

FACTORS AFFECTING EYE HEALTH

The severity of discomfort produced by air pollution is determined by the levels of hydrocarbons and nitric oxide in ambient air. Hydrocarbon chemicals that cause such irritation in the eyes are C4 and C5 olefins, produced by automobiles. “According to IQair.com, air pollution in most of India’s major cities ranges from bad to severe, with air quality index (AQI) readings above 400. Aside from the traditional culprits such as automobile exhaust and industrial trash, open burning of agricultural waste exacerbates the problem,” adds Dr Sharma.

EFFECTS OF POLLUTION ON THE EYES

With regular exposure, air pollution can cause tearing, burning, blurred vision, glaucoma and dry eye syndrome, which is irreversible.

“Dry eye syndrome is a condition where the eye does not produce enough tears to moisturise the eye, causing it to remain dry all the time, leading to irritation. If this persists for a prolonged period, it can even lead to vision loss,” shares Dr Mahipal Sachdev, medical director and chairman, Centre for Sight Group of Eye Hospitals.

Air pollutants can also cause chemical conjunctivitis. Typically recognised as ‘pink eye’, conjunctivitis refers to contamination or swelling within the outer membrane of our eyeball. “Treatment includes rinsing the eye thoroughly with saline and may require the use of typical steroids,” adds Dr Sachdev. Many individuals are also experiencing burning sensation in the eyes, as a result of air pollutants such as nitric oxide, nitrogen dioxide, and sulphur dioxide in the air.

HOW TO PROTECT YOUR EYES

Avoiding exposure to harmful pollutants is the golden rule. However, eye symptoms can be minimised in a polluted environment by following these tips. Avoid rubbing your eyes, even if particulates enter them, as this may cause abrasion on the cornea.

Wash your eyes thoroughly with water. If foreign body sensation persists, visit an ophthalmologist. Lubricating eye drops prescribed by eye specialists can also offer comfort. Wear sunglasses when outdoors, which protects the eyes against UV rays that can cause long-term problems. Don't wear contact lenses when outside. If you do need to wear them, opt for disposable ones.

(Inputs by Dr Vineeta Tandon, senior consultant, Internal Medicine, PSRI Hospital, Delhi and Dr Jinish Upadhyay, consultant ophthalmologist, Masina Hospital, Mumbai)

The eye, being of the most sensitive organs, is continually toxic exposed to the posing a environment, to eye significant risk in health and eyesight general. SHARMA, DR SAUMYA Senior consultant