



**KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE**  
HEALTH  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

# McCord Provincial Eye Hospital

## Eye2eyE

Volume 1, Issue 1

An initiative for staff education from McCord Provincial Eye Hospital

APRIL 2025

### VERNAL KERATO CONJUNCTIVITIS (VKC)



#### Inside this Issue:

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#### Special points of interest:

- DEFINING VKC
- SIGNS & SYMPTOMS
- SEVERITY / STAGES OF VKC
- TREATMENT
- REFERRAL PROCESS
- DIETARY INFORMATION
- PATIENT INFORMATION PAMPHLETS to print as needed

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# Notes from Management

## DR S.R. Naidoo (Acting CEO)

Vernal-kerato conjunctivitis (VKC) remains a significant challenge in ophthalmology, particularly in paediatric and adolescent patients. This recurrent and often debilitating allergic eye condition not only affects vision and quality of life but also poses a risk of long-term complications, including corneal damage and keratoconus.

This publication serves as a resource, providing insights into the pathophysiology, diagnosis and treatment of VKC as well as raising awareness among healthcare providers and caregivers.

It is our hope that this publication will serve as an invaluable reference for clinicians and students alike, fostering a deeper understanding of VKC.

Well done to Sr N. Kemp and the team who envisioned this publication. You truly inspire us!

## Matron L. Ntonintshi (Deputy Nursing Manager)

The prevalence of VKC in children seen at Mccord Provincial Eye Hospital is high, especially in male individuals commonly over the age of 5 years and is usually resolved by puberty. Associated factors include exposure to dust, personal and family history, Vitamin D3 deficiency and HIV. The mixed form of VKC is the most frequent form seen and conjunctival pigmentation might be an early diagnostic sign.

Childhood screening programs for VKC should be established to reduce the morbidity caused by VKC and improve quality of life, thus decreasing school absenteeism that is seen in these cohort of patients. Education is crucial and this issue and subsequent issues will assist nurses especially in the clinics to manage their patients with eye conditions effectively.

Awareness plays a pivotal role in reducing the negative impact and decrease complications of this treatable condition. I urge all nurse to study this edition, teach other nurse, patients and the community at large.

VKC education should include online learning resources and tools for educators, service providers and families to support individuals with VKC. Keeping on top of treatment is the key to living optimally with this condition. The child and parents must understand why treatment is important for keeping their eyes healthy so they can do the things they love.

## Project Co-ordinator: Sr N. Kemp (Ophthalmic Nurse OPD MPEH)

Eye2eyE is an initiative that is being implemented to encourage, enlighten and empower clinicians within the field of ophthalmology. Upgrading knowledge and skills within our ophthalmology department is our key aim, in order to provide holistic and competent eye care to our patients.

We envision this publication to be used as a learning tool for MPEH staff as well as a guideline to clinicians referring to MPEH from outlying clinics, government and private institutions.

A heartfelt thank you goes out to our multi-disciplinary team for their support and contribution towards this new publication.

## MPEH VISION, MISSION & OUR OBJECTIVE

### VISION:

Optimal Eye Health for all persons in Kwa Zulu Natal.

### MISSION:

To provide a sustainable and comprehensive eye health care services at a Provincial level through Batho Pele principles with universal access to all persons living in KZN.

### OBJECTIVE OF THE Eye2eyE PUBLICATION:

- To create awareness of eye conditions and treatment of these conditions at MPEH, amongst staff, referral clinicians and private clinicians.
- To upgrade ophthalmic skills and knowledge amongst clinicians.
- To encourage clinicians to use Eye2eyE as a learning tool and guideline to diagnose and treat eye conditions competently.

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**McCord Provincial Eye Hospital was opened in April 2025 to provide eye services to the province. The services we provide are:**

**NEW patients referred to MPEH**

<p>Screening:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Diabetic retinopathy</li> <li>Glaucoma</li> <li>Cataract</li> </ul> <p>Minor procedures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Foreign body removal</li> <li>Probing and syringing</li> <li>I&amp;D chalazion</li> </ul>	<p>Optometry services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Paediatric cycloplegic refraction</li> <li>Adult refraction</li> </ul> <p>Treatment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allergic eye disease</li> <li>Dry eye</li> </ul>
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**Primary Eye Care Unit (PECU)**

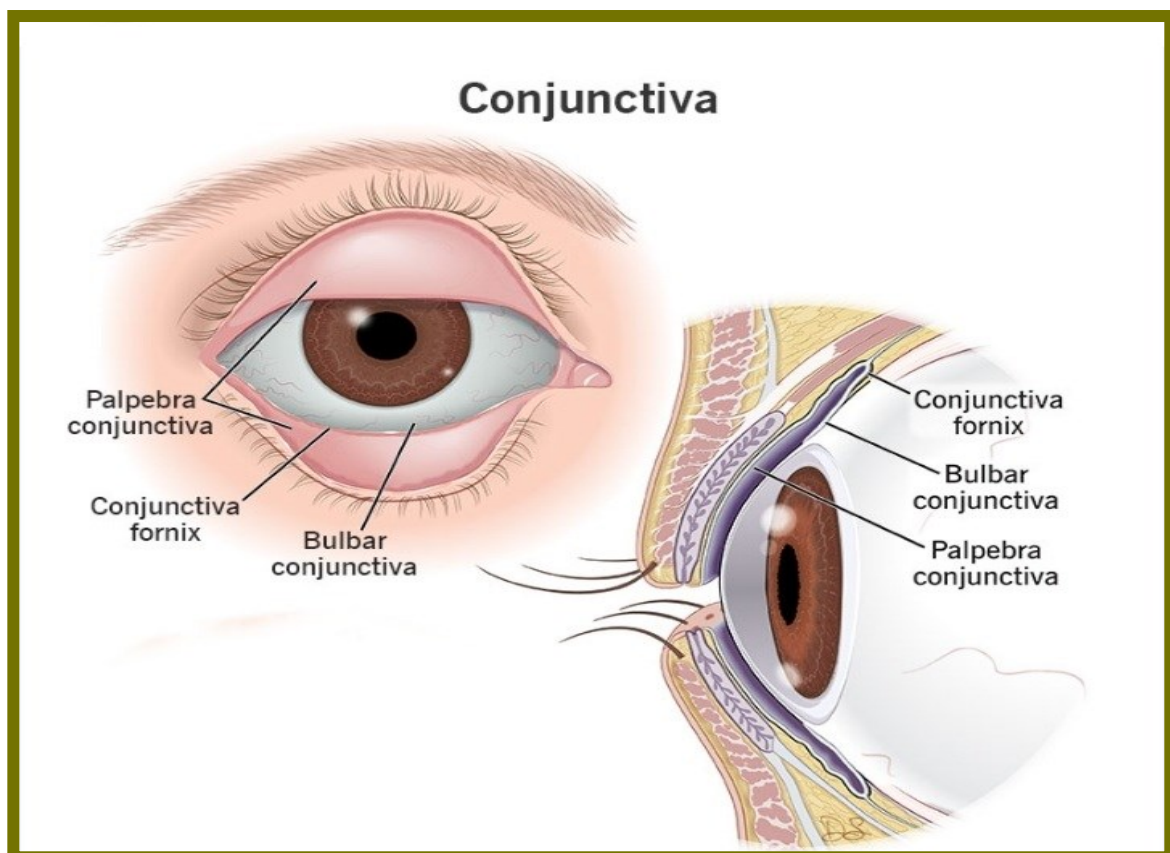
<p><b>Anterior segment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Keratitis</li> <li>Corneal Graft</li> <li>Amnion graft</li> <li>Keratoconus</li> <li>Pterygium</li> <li>Ocular surface tumors</li> <li>Crosslinking</li> </ul> <p><b>Cataract</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High volume unit: simple</li> <li>Academic theatres: complex</li> <li>MSIC</li> <li>Phaco-emulsification</li> </ul> <p><b>Glaucoma</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adult</li> <li>Paediatric</li> <li>Laser</li> <li>Cyclophocoagulation</li> <li>Iridotomy</li> <li>SLT</li> <li>Angle surgery</li> <li>Trabeculectomy</li> <li>Tube-shunt surgery</li> </ul> <p><b>Oculo-plastics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Eyelid surgery</li> <li>Orbital surgery</li> <li>Orbital implants</li> <li>Evisceration</li> <li>Enucleation</li> <li>Exenteration</li> </ul>	<p><b>Ocular inflammation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Medical management of Ocular surface inflammation and Uveitis</li> </ul> <p><b>Lasers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Yag laser</li> <li>Argon laser</li> <li>Diode laser</li> <li>SLT laser</li> </ul> <p><b>Paediatrics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strabismus &amp; amblyopia</li> <li>Cataract</li> <li>ROP screening</li> <li>Paediatric cataract</li> <li>Screening for Retinoblastoma</li> </ul> <p><b>Medical retina</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Diabetic retinopathy management</li> <li>Argon Laser</li> <li>Avastin injection</li> </ul> <p><b>Surgical retina</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Specialist clinic for opinion</li> </ul> <p><b>Optometry</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Refraction for Adults &amp; Paediatrics</li> <li>Contact lens clinic</li> <li>Low vision clinic</li> </ul>
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# Definitions

- **Allergy**: is an immune system overreaction to a substance, called an allergen, eg. Pollen , dust, pollutants in the environment, familial.
- **Conjunctiva**: thin film membrane that covers inner eyelids (upper and lower).
- **Palpebral**: covers upper and lower inner eyelids.
- **Bulbar**: covers the **sclera** (white of the eye) up until the cornea.
- Conjunctiva does not cover the cornea, it stops at the cornea, called the ***limbal area***.
- **Cornea** : clear, dome-shaped, front layer of the eye, that allows light to enter the eye and helps focus vision.
- **Limbitis**: inflammation of the limbal area.
- **Neovascularization**: process of new blood vessels forming in the body.
- **Keratoconus**: is when the dome shaped cornea, that allows light into the eye, becomes thinned out and changes its shape and bulges out like a cone. This then causes the light rays to bend differently causing blurry vision.

## Anatomy of the Eye



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# VKC Causes & Treatment

Also known as : Spring Catarrh / allergic conjunctivitis / Atopic conjunctivitis

These are types of allergic eye conditions.

## What causes it:

- If you or your family have allergic diseases such as hay fever, asthma, eczema, wheezing or sinusitis
- Allergic diseases happen when the immune system reacts to harmless substances like dust, pollen or pollutants in the air.
- **Occurs mostly during Spring and Summer seasons.**
- **Prevalent in hot and dry climates**

## Treatment of VKC:

- Majority occur between the ages of 3 to 25 years and treatment is required once VKC has been diagnosed.
- Treatment is prescribed to prevent the child from rubbing the eyes and causing further damage to the cornea and resulting in vision loss.
- VKC can resolve spontaneously at puberty.
- Allergic conjunctivitis (AKC) tends to continue from 25 years onwards and depends on environmental conditions.


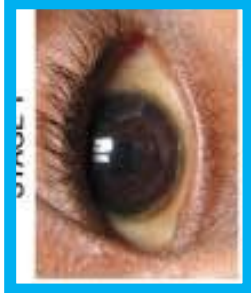



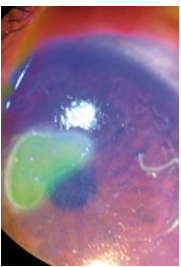
## A special note for children:

### Obesity and Allergic Conditions in Children

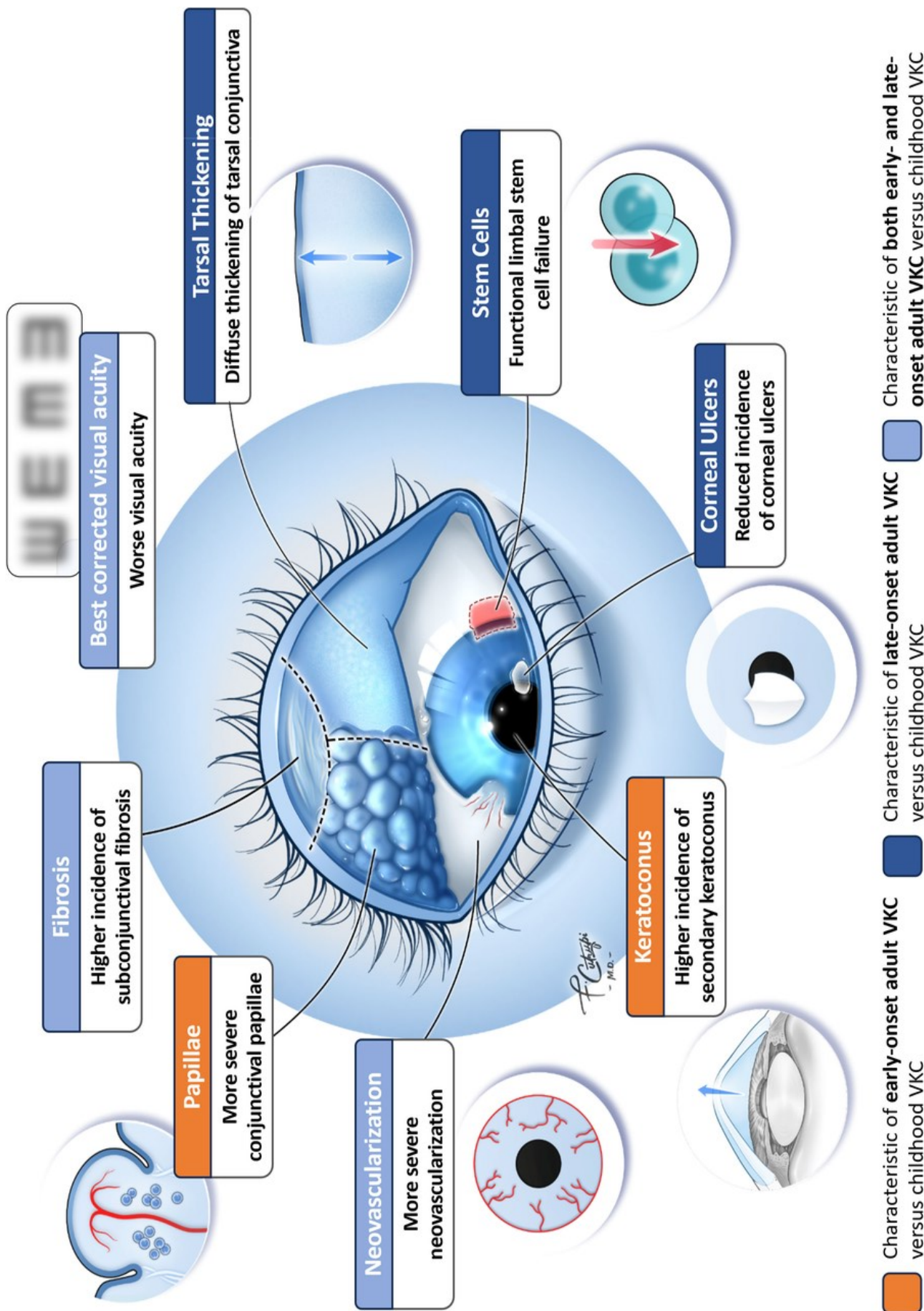
- Emerging evidence suggests a link between obesity and allergic diseases in children, including rhinitis and dermatitis.
- **Maintaining a healthy weight** through a balanced diet with minimal processed foods and refined sugars may help manage allergic inflammation. Ensure growth monitoring and adjust diet to ensure all **growth and development needs** are met while incorporating allergy-friendly nutrient-rich foods.
- **Avoiding highly processed, pro-inflammatory foods** and emphasizing whole, minimally processed foods to support immune health.

For families open to plant-based meals, **well-planned vegetarian options** can provide beneficial nutrients while reducing inflammatory triggers.



Classification	Clear	Mild	Moderate	Severe
Picture				  
Signs	Clear eyes	Clear eyes	Red, swollen eyelids	Red, inflamed eyes, swollen eyelids (blepharitis)
Symptoms	Itchy	Itchy, tearing	Itchy, tearing, white stringy discharge	Itchy, tearing, white stringy discharge
Sclera	Clear, white	Clear, white	Brownish discoloration	Brownish discoloration
Conjunctiva	Clear	Clear	Red in colour	Red, inflamed, cobble-stoning
Cornea	Clear	Clear	Clear	Hazy, unclear, ulcer may be present on staining
Limbitis	Nil	Nil	Present	Present, with complete
Treatment plan	1st line treatment Script by PHC Prof/nurse Script by Ophthalmic Nurse	1st line treatment Script by PHC Prof/nurse Script by Ophthalmic Nurse	2nd line treatment Script by PHC Prof/nurse District level institutions Script by Ophthalmic Nurse	Refer ophthalmologist, patient is most often admitted for further management Script by Ophthalmologist only





# Pharmacy Corner

	MEDICATION	EXAMPLES (in use at DoH)	IMAGE OF EYE DROPS
1 <sup>st</sup> line treatment  LOCAL CLINICS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· <b>Artificial tears</b> (preservative-free) for lubrication and symptomatic relief (for older patients)</li> <li>· <b>Mast cell stabilizers:</b> Sodium cromoglycate eye drops to prevent histamine release (results seen over long term use)</li> <li>· <b>Side effects:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stinging, burning sensation, in rare cases</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. ALLERGEX TAB</li> <li>2. ALLERGEX EYE DROPS</li> <li>3. OXYLIN EYE DROPS</li> </ol> <p>The above eye drops should be used as short term treatment, ie. one month or less</p>	
2 <sup>nd</sup> line treatment PHC / Ophthalmic Nurse /DISTRICT LEVEL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· <b>Antihistamines:</b> Olopatadine eye drops for itch relief</li> <li>· <b>Dual-action agents</b> (mast cell stabilizer + antihistamine): Olopatadine for both acute and preventive effects.</li> <li>· <b>Side effects:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Burning, stinging sensation</li> <li>• Dry eyes</li> <li>• Blurry vision</li> </ul> </li> <li>· <b>In rare cases</b></li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. PATANOL eye drops</li> <li>2. SPEASATEAR EYE DROPS</li> <li>3. FML (AFTER FUNDOSCOPY TO RULE OUT DISC CHANGES)</li> </ol>	
3 <sup>rd</sup> line treatment  OPHTHALMIC DOCTORS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· <b>Topical corticosteroids:</b> Fluorometholone for short-term use to control inflammation (under specialist supervision to avoid complications like cataracts and glaucoma)</li> <li>· <b>Calcineurin inhibitors:</b> Cyclosporine eye drops for steroid-sparing, long-term control in refractory cases</li> <li>· <b>Side effects:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prolonged use may cause: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cataracts</li> <li>• Glaucoma</li> <li>• Increased risk of eye infections</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. FML eye drops</li> <li>2. Maxitrol ointment</li> <li>3. Patanol eyedrops</li> <li>4. Speasatear eyedrops</li> </ol>	
Management of corneal complications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· <b>Antibiotics</b> (if secondary bacterial infection is suspected)</li> <li>• <b>Surgical intervention</b> for persistent corneal shield ulcers</li> </ul>		<p><b>DISCLAIMER:</b></p> <p>Medication list correct at time of publication</p>

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# VKC Nutritional Recommendations

## 1. Micronutrient Support for Immune Modulation

VITAMIN	ACTION	FOODS
A, D, E	Support immune tolerance and reduce allergic inflammation. Supplementation may aid in symptom management.	Practically the recommendation would be to include more vegetables and fruits which are naturally high in vitamins.
A	Other foods high in immune modulating nutrients	Liver, (chicken/beef), egg yolks, cod liver oil, carrots, sweet potatoes, spinach, kale, pumpkin, red peppers and apricots.
D	Besides natural light on the skin, it can be found in the following foods	Fatty fish (salmon, mackerel, sardines), egg yolks, mushrooms (that have been exposed to sunlight).
E	Support immune tolerance and reduce allergic inflammation.	<b>Nuts and seeds</b> (almond, sunflower seeds, hazelnuts), <b>Oils</b> (wheat germ oil, sunflower oil, olive oil) <b>Vegetables</b> (spinach, avocado, and broccoli)
Iron & Zinc	Essential for immune balance; deficiencies can trigger allergic responses. Ensuring adequate intake through food or supplements is crucial.	<b>Iron</b> is found naturally in meats (specifically red meats and organ meats) but is also found in these non-animal products such as lentils, tofu, quinoa, fortified cereals, spinach and pumpkin seeds. <b>Zinc</b> is found in meat as well as lentils, chickpeas and cashew nuts.
Selenium & Copper	Play a role in reducing inflammation and improving antioxidant defenses.	<b>Animal sources of selenium</b> is found in meats mostly and in non-animal sources Brazil nuts, brown rice, whole wheat, sunflower seeds, mushrooms and oats. <b>Food sources of copper</b> include meats and a variety of seeds and nuts.

## 2. Dietary Strategies to Reduce Inflammation

- A **plant-based diet** rich in vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and legumes can reduce systemic inflammation and improve immune function.
- Incorporating **flavonoid-rich foods** (e.g., berries, apples, onions and tea) supports antioxidant and anti-inflammatory pathways beneficial for allergic conditions.

## 3. Weight Management and Allergy Control

- Obesity is linked to worsened allergic responses. Weight loss via a **balanced, nutrient-dense diet** (low in processed foods and saturated fats) has been shown to improve allergic symptoms. Processed foods include meats such as polony, viennas, wors, hams/cured meats, sausages but also includes chips, takeaways, sweets, ready to eat meals, instant noodles, cereals and packaged snacks to mention a few.
- **Energy intake moderation** and ensuring adequate fibre intake help regulate immune responses.

## 4. Probiotic and Gut Health Support

- A diverse gut microbiome positively impacts immune tolerance to allergens.
- Including **fermented foods** (e.g., yogurt, amasi, kefir, kombucha, sauerkraut kimchi, miso) and fibre-rich foods supports gut health and reduces inflammation.

## 5. Potential Dietary Interventions

- Exploring plant-based diets as a complementary approach to medical treatment, focusing on **nutrient-dense, anti-inflammatory foods**.

Further clinical research is needed, but a **diet low in pro-inflammatory foods** (refined sugars, processed foods, and trans fats) may help alleviate symptoms.

# References

## Image References:

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# Acknowledgements

**Eye2eyE** is an initiative by Sr N. Kemp (Ophthalmic Nurse) MPEH (Eye clinic) and a Collaboration of MPEH staff :

- Dr S. Naidoo (Acting CEO MPEH)
- Dr S. Khumalo (Ophthalmology Dept)
- Mr R. Maharaj (Pharmacy)
- Mrs J. Perks ( Dietitian & Editor)
- OM P.P. Bhenghu (Ops Manager-OPD)
- OM S.M. Naidoo (Ops Manager-Ward)
- N. Ndlovu (HAST team)
- Mrs J. Naidoo ( Optometry)
- Ms R. Seedat (Optometrist)
- Mr D.D. Bhengu ( Translator / Proof reader)

Thank you to the above staff for their support and contribution to this publication



## **PATIENT HEALTH EDUCATION FOR VKC**

VKC is a chronic condition of an eye allergy that will continue from childhood to over 21 years of age.

### **Causes:**

- Family history of allergies, eg. asthma, eczema, sinusitis
- Exposure to pollen, dust, pollutants
- Hot, dry and windy climates (when weather changes)

### **Signs & Symptoms:**

- Intense itchiness
- Tearing
- Light sensitivity
- Gritty feeling
- Thick, stringy mucus discharge

### **HOW TO TREAT VKC AT HOME:**

1. Always ensure that chronic allergies are treated, along with VKC. If not treated then VKC will continue and symptoms will worsen.
2. Avoid any allergens, eg. Pollen, dust and house dust mites, if possible.
3. Cool compresses: apply cool, damp cloth to help soothe itchiness and discomfort.
4. Avoid exposure to sunlight over long periods.
5. Use of sunglasses and sun hat when going into the sun is advised.
6. Avoid rubbing the eyes to prevent worsening of the condition
7. Manage house dust mites by regularly cleaning bedding, pillows and beds.
8. Use prescribed eye drops to help with symptoms
9. Always keep doctors' appointments, in order to check progress of the condition.

### **Nutritional Considerations and Recommendations for VKC**

Diet can be an important tool to manage VKC. For both adults and children a diet rich in vegetables and fruits can provide necessary vitamins, nutrients and fibre to support the immune system and ensure good gut health and reduce inflammation within the body.

Other important sources of good nutrition are legumes (lentils, chickpeas and split peas) as they are high in fibre and other beneficial nutrients. Reducing the intake of processed foods found in sugary beverages and foods as well as processed meats (polony, viennas, wors, ham etc) and takeaways will also allow symptom alleviation, weight management assistance and immunity improvement.

Managing weight in both adults and children is important and following a healthy eating plan. Speak to a nutrition advisor or dietitian in your healthcare facility for more advice.

***Follow good hand hygiene techniques!!!***

### **A special note for children:**

#### **1. Obesity and Allergic Conditions in Children**

Emerging evidence suggests a link between obesity and allergic diseases in children, including rhinitis and dermatitis.

2. **Maintaining a healthy weight** through a balanced diet with minimal processed foods and refined sugars may help manage allergic inflammation. Ensure growth monitoring and adjust diet to ensure all **growth and development needs** are met while incorporating allergy-friendly nutrient-rich foods.
3. Avoiding **highly processed, pro-inflammatory foods** and emphasizing whole, minimally processed foods to support immune health.

I VKC yisifo esingukuzwela okungekuhle kweso esingaqala ebunganeni kuze kube sebudaleni

**Izimbangela zalesisifo**

Kungaba ukudluliselana emndenini uma kukhona owake waba naso i.e. isifo samaphaphu, ukuluma kwesikhumba Kanye nesifo sokuluma kwamakhala

Ukuba sendaweni enempova, uthuli, nokungcola

Ukushisa, ukoma nomoya wesimo sezulu (uma kushintsha isimo sezulu)

**Izimpawu okumele uziqaphele**

Ukuluma okungapheli emehlweni

Ukuphuma kwezinyembezi

Ukuzwela kwamehlo uma ebona ukukhanya

Ukuzwa ngathi amehlo anenhlabathi

Ukukhihliza ubhici olushubile

**Uvelapha kanjani i-VKC ekhaya**

1. Qiniseka ukuthi ama-allergy uyawelapha. Uma ungayelaphi i-VKC iqhubeka kakhulu kunakuqala
2. Gwema izinto ezinto ezingabangela ukuba isifo sivuke; indawo enosi kumbe izintuli
3. Cwilisa indwangu ehlanzekile emanzini abandayo, uyibeke emehlweni sakuthoba, isiza ukwehlisa ukuluma kwamehlo Kanye nokuphazamiseka kwamehlo.
4. Ukuba selangeni isikhathi eside
5. Faka izibuko zelanga Kanye nesigqoko selanga uma uzohamba elangeni
6. Gwema ukuhlilikhla amehlo, ukuvikela ukuqhubekela phambili kwesimo.
7. Hlanza indlu ukususa uthuli ngokushintsha imicamelo nezingubo zokulala

**Izincomo zokudla okunomsoco ongakudla uma une-VKC**

Indlela odla ngayo iyisikhali esibalulekile ukulawula isifo. Kwabadala nabancane ukudla okunezithelo eziningi kunganika izakhamzimba ezidingekayo emzimbeni, umsoco Kanye ne-fibre ukulekelela amasosha omzimba nokuqinisa isimo sempilo kwehle nokuvuvukala okungaphakathi emzimbeni.

Eminye imithombo ebalulekile yomsoco amalentela, uphizi ngezinhlobo zawo, njengalokhu zine-fibre eningi Kanye nomsoco. Ukunciphisa izidlo ezilondoloziwe ezitholakala eziphuzweni ezinoshukela nasekudleni Kanye nasezinyameni ezithakiwe njengo-polony, ama-vienna, i-wors, ne-ham, Kanye nokuthengwayo okuyisipesheli, kunganciphisa ukugula, kulekelele ekwehliseni umzimba futhi kuqinise amasosha omzimba

Kubalulekile kwabadala nabancane ukugcina isisindo somzimba sisesimweni esifanelekile, nokulandela indlela yokudla okunempilo.

Khulumisana nomeluleki wezokudla esikhungweni sezempilo ngezeluleko ezingeziwe

**Okubalulekile Ngezingane**

**Ukukhuluphala kanye Nezimo Zama-Allergy Ezinganeni**

Ubufakazi obuvelayo buveza ukuxhumana phakathi kokukhuluphala kanye nezifo ze-allergy ezinganeni, okufaka ukuvuvukala kothwethwesi olusemakhaleni okubanga ukucinana (rhinitis), kanye nokuvuvukala kwesikhumba okubanga umqubuko, bese kuluma futhi kome (dermatitis).

**Ukugcina isisindo somzimba esinempilo** ngokudla okufanele nokulingene futhi unciphise izidlo ezicolisisiwe kanye noshukela ocolisisiwe kungasiza ukulawula ukuvuvukala okudalwa ngama-allergy. Qinisekisa ukuqapha uku-khula kanye nokuhlela ukudla ukuqinisekisa ukuthi zonke **izidingo zokukhula nokuthuthuka** ngokufaka izidlo ezinomsoco nezilwa nama-allergy.

Gwema **izidlo ezicolisise kakhulu, futhi nezikhuthaza ukuvuvukala** futhi ugcizelele izidlo eziphelele, nezicolisise kancane ukuphasa amasosha omzimba.