

EYE-Q

by R. Thomas Barowsky, MD

Contact Lenses Care for Healthy Vision

Contact lenses continue to be a very popular alternative to eyeglasses for a number of reasons including personal appearance, convenience, job safety, sports participation and quality of vision. Since they are not an inexpensive option for glasses the wearer of contact lenses should also have a financial interest in their care and use. A few weeks ago I spoke about the problems that can befall the eye when it is deprived of oxygen from improperly wearing contact lenses. Today I'll discuss some of the other pitfalls that can jeopardize the health of your eyes from improper contact lens wear.

I have on many occasions in my career seen the damage that can be done to a young person's eyes from the misuse and abuse of contacts. Today's column will cover some of the ways contact lens wearers unknowingly risk permanent damage to their vision by not following a few simple rules when wearing contacts.

Proper Lubrication

Soft contact lenses are made of materials that require substantial amounts of fluid to keep them properly shaped and comfortable on your eyes. Typically a soft contact lens will contain anywhere from 55-65% water. If you have been advised by your eye care provider that you don't make lubricating tears as well as you once did, then you need to use a lubricating drop regularly in your eyes when wearing contact lenses. This will help to keep them properly hydrated and comfortable. As the lens starts to dry out it will become irritating in the eye and has the potential to cause other serious complications. Many lubricating drops are available on the market; most are quite good but some are a total waste of time and money. Check with your contact lens prescriber for the type they recommend and use them frequently.

Sleeping In Contact Lenses

This is by far the most common problem I see in contact lens wear. Many companies promote this advantage for their product and it sure sounds great to wake up in the morning with crisp clear vision without having to first stick your fingers in your eyes. The thing we sometimes forget is that during sleep our tear production decreases significantly because the tear pump caused by blinking is inactive. Since most contact lenses are from 50 to 60% water content there is a need to provide moisture to prevent them from drying out. During sleep even a small amount of contact lens drying causes a change in the way the contact fits. As a result this causes the cornea to swell slightly and it's possible to get small discreet scratches on the cornea. Once these scratches occur, microbes can get into the underlying tissues. Most cases of eye infection caused this way can be treated with standard prescription eye drops along with removing the contacts until the infection clears. Unfortunately, this is not always the case and serious parasitic

and fungal infections may also lead not only to sight stealing infections but the potential for loss of the eye.

Back-up Glasses

I instruct all my contact lens patients on the importance of having a pair of prescription eyeglasses in back-up. If an emergency should occur in the middle of the night it is certainly faster to grab your glasses and head away from the threat than worry about getting the right solutions or the correct contact in the correct eye. In addition if the contact lens wearer tears a contact while away from home or on vacation, a pair of back-up glasses can save the day. Let's not forget the allergy sufferer either. There will be times of the year when wearing contacts just isn't comfortable. Having a pair of glasses to get you past those seasonal bumps in the road is very important.

Contact Lens Solutions and Cases

All contact lens solutions are the same, NOT. I hope there is no one anywhere on the planet that still thinks homemade contact lens solutions are okay. I have treated some of the most serious eye infections as a result of homemade solutions with the worst possible results. Never, not even once, think that these solutions are safe. While we are on the subject of homemade I need to mention one other agent that is horribly wrong to use. It is never okay to put your contact lens, hard or soft, in your mouth to wet it before putting it in your eye. Yuck, if we had clean mouths the mouthwash industry would have been out of business a century ago. Always use only the lens solution recommended by your eye doctor or pharmacist for the type of contact lens you are wearing. Your contact lens case should be cleaned daily by rinsing it with your contact lens cleaning solution to ensure that it is a safe haven for your contacts.

Just a few simple steps to reduce your risk and increase your contact lens wearing enjoyment.

If you have questions about your eye health e-mail Dr. Barowsky at doctom@tdkj.com and we'll try to answer your questions here at Eye-Q.