Contact Lens 101: a Back-to-School Must for Teens

Studying up on proper contact lens care can prevent serious eye infections

Many children and teenagers start wearing contact lenses in junior high or high school. However, young people are notoriously poor at caring for their contact lenses, creating a potential gateway for serious eye infections that can cause impaired vision or even blindness.

Contact lenses have been implicated in nearly 25 percent of children’s emergency room visits related to medical devices. Research has shown that poor contact lens care practices by teens and young people raise their risk of eye conditions such as infectious keratitis and corneal ulcers. In the most severe cases, they may require corneal transplants to restore sight.

To help prevent contact lens related eye infections in young people, the American Academy of Ophthalmology and the West Windsor Health Department and are providing tips for teens and their parents this August in recognition of Back to School Eye Health Month.

“I’ve seen plenty of young people who misuse contact lenses and end up with serious eye infections that are largely preventable with good hygiene and diligence,” said Thomas Steinemann, M.D., clinical spokesperson for the American Academy of Ophthalmology. “Parents can help protect their children’s vision – and their future – by sharing the potential consequences of not caring for their contact lenses the right way, and reinforcing good contact lens habits early on.”

Fortunately, many eye infections can be prevented by following simple contact lens care guidelines. Even so, experts say there are lesser known safety tips that teens with contact lenses should follow to avoid eye infections.

Four Contact Lens Tips Every Parent Should Share with Their Teens

1. **New quarter, new case** – Replacing your contact lens case every three months will help keep germs at bay. To make it easy to remember, swap out your case at the beginning of each quarter. A study from the journal *Ophthalmology* showed that waiting to replace lens cases after 6 months increases the risk of eye infection by nearly 5.5 times.
2. **Just say no to H2O** – You may be captain of the swim team, but you shouldn’t swim, shower or go in a hot tub wearing lenses. Water from the tap might be clean enough to drink or bathe in, but it’s still home to the parasite Acanthamoeba, which can cause severe eye infections resulting in vision loss.iii For the same reasons, do not use water to rinse or soak contact lenses or cases.

3. **You snooze, you lose** – Never sleep in your contact lenses. The same *Ophthalmology* study also found that even occasionally sleeping in contact lenses increases the risk of moderate to severe eye infection by 6.5 times. Unfortunately, a recent poll of nearly 100,000 people by BuzzFeed found that about 70 percent of respondents occasionally or regularly sleep in their contact lenses.iv

4. **It’s too late if you wait** – Symptoms of eye infections include redness, pain and light sensitivity, and should be examined by an ophthalmologist immediately. Waiting to get examined or treated could lead to vision loss.

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i Emergency Department Visits for Medical Device-Associated Adverse Events Among Children, *Pediatrics*, 2010


iv 11 Gross Contact Lens Habits You Should Stop Doing Right Away Please, BuzzFeed.com

Information adapted from the American Academy of Ophthalmology and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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