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## **Contact Lenses: A Safe Option When Used Properly**

*AOA's New American Eye-Q® Survey Finds Many Contact Wearers Follow Good Hygiene, But There's Room for Improvement*

**ST. LOUIS, Mo., October 20, 2010** – For 40 million Americans, using contact lenses to improve vision is a way of life. While a good number adhere to the medical guidelines for wearing contacts, some do not. According to the American Optometric Association's (AOA) annual American Eye-Q® survey, many are breaking the rules and putting their health and vision at risk by doing so.

“Contact lenses are among the safest forms of vision correction when patients follow the proper care and wearing instructions provided by their eye doctor,” said Dr. Christine Sindt, OD, FAAO, Associate Professor of Clinical Ophthalmology, Department of Ophthalmology and Vision Sciences, University of Iowa, and Chair of the Contact Lens and Cornea Section of AOA. “When patients do not use lenses as directed, however, the consequences can be serious.”

According to the 2010 American Eye-Q® survey, nearly a quarter of respondents do replace daily disposable lenses every day, but the majority of respondents wear the disposable lenses longer than recommended, a big mistake as this can increase deposits and adherence of bacteria on the lens, which could cause damage to the cornea.

Additionally, a quarter of respondents reported wearing contact lenses while sleeping, another hazardous habit that can lead to infections and dry eye syndrome.

“It's easy for patients to forget that contact lenses are medical devices and as such, should be handled with an appropriate level of caution,” said Dr. Sindt. “Clean and safe handling of contacts is one of the most important measures wearers can take to protect their sight.”

The AOA's survey shows that although a majority of contact lens wearers (58 percent) clean and disinfect them with an appropriate solution, another 23 percent of respondents soak or clean lenses in water, and 12 percent store their contacts in something other than a typical storage case. Cleaning and rinsing lenses are necessary to remove mucus, secretions, films or deposits which may have accumulated during wearing, while disinfecting is required to destroy harmful germs. Water does not disinfect lenses; in fact it can actually contaminate contacts. Using something other than an appropriate case for storing lenses can allow bacteria to grow on or near contacts.

### **Kids and Contact Lenses**

More than half of optometrists feel it is appropriate to introduce a child to soft contact lenses between the ages of 10-12, with daily disposable contact lenses being the most frequently prescribed contacts for this age group, according to the AOA.

“Studies in children's vision correction confirm that contacts provide additional benefits to children beyond simply correcting their vision, including significantly improving how they feel

about their physical appearance, acceptance among friends, and ability to play sports, so it's no surprise that optometrists and parents are becoming more comfortable with the decision to recommend contact lenses to children when vision correction is required," adds Dr. Sindt. "But, it's imperative that children follow an optometrist's directions regarding wearing schedule, replacement schedule and wear and care regimens."

Of the American Eye-Q survey respondents who are parents, 17 percent indicated that their child wears contact lenses. The survey also indicated that 12-13 years old (30 percent) is the most popular age at which children first started wearing contact lenses.

"If you are considering contact lenses for your child, consider their level of responsibility and social interactions," said Dr. Sindt. "If you have to remind your child several times about completing a daily chore, they probably aren't ready for the responsibility of properly caring for and handling contact lenses. Alternatively, you can speak with your optometrist about the option of daily disposable contact lenses for your child."

### **Circle Lenses**

Another cause for concern is the recent popularity of "circle-tinted" contact lenses, which makes the eye's iris appear larger. In 2005, the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) classified all contact lenses, whether they correct vision or are used simply for cosmetics, as medical devices. In the United States, contact lenses cannot be obtained legally without a prescription. Since the sources for many of these products are typically outside of the U.S., many do not meet FDA requirements for prescription verification, and in some cases, wearers are risking their vision in order to be fashion-forward.

"Consumers who purchase lenses without a prescription or without consultation from an eye doctor put themselves at risk of serious bacterial infection, or even significant damage to the eye's ability to function, with the potential for irreversible sight loss," Dr. Sindt warns.

Contact lens wearers who don't follow the guidelines for use and wear can experience symptoms such as blurred or fuzzy vision; red or irritated eyes; uncomfortable lenses; pain in and around the eyes or, a more serious condition in which the cornea becomes inflamed, also known as keratitis.

"One of the simplest things contact lens wearers can do to ensure the well-being of their eyes is to see their optometrist regularly," said Dr. Sindt. "Comprehensive eye exams can detect any signs of contact-related problems and treat them before they permanently damage eye and vision health."

The AOA offers the following recommendations for contact lens wearers:

- Always wash and dry your hands before handling contact lenses.
- Carefully and regularly clean contact lenses, as directed by your eye doctor. Rub the contact lenses with fingers and rinse thoroughly before soaking lenses overnight in sufficient multi-purpose solution to completely cover the lens.
- Store lenses in the proper lens storage case and replace your case every three months or sooner. Clean the case after each use, and keep it open and dry between cleanings.
- Use only products recommended by your eye doctor to clean and disinfect your lenses. Saline solution and rewetting drops are not designed to disinfect lenses.



- Only fresh solution should be used to clean and store contact lenses. Never re-use old solution. Contact lens solution must be changed according to the manufacturer's recommendations, even if the lenses are not used daily.
- Always follow the recommended contact lens replacement schedule prescribed by your eye doctor.
- Remove contact lenses before swimming or entering a hot tub.
- See your eye doctor for your regularly scheduled contact lens and eye examination.

To find an optometrist in your area, or for additional information on the importance of contact lens hygiene and compliance, please visit [www.aoa.org](http://www.aoa.org).

**About the survey:**

*The fifth annual American Eye-Q® survey was created and commissioned in conjunction with Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates (PSB). From April 14-21, 2010, using an online methodology, PSB interviewed 1,007 Americans 18 years and older who embodied a nationally representative sample of U.S. general population. (Margin of error at 95 percent confidence level)*

**About the American Optometric Association (AOA):**

*The American Optometric Association represents approximately 36,000 doctors of optometry, optometry students and paraoptometric assistants and technicians. Optometrists serve patients in nearly 6,500 communities across the country, and in 3,500 of those communities are the only eye doctors. Doctors of optometry provide two-thirds of all primary eye care in the United States.*

*American Optometric Association doctors of optometry are highly qualified, trained doctors on the frontline of eye and vision care who examine, diagnose, treat and manage diseases and disorders of the eye. In addition to providing eye and vision care, optometrists play a major role in a patient's overall health and well-being by detecting systemic diseases such as diabetes and hypertension.*

*Prior to optometry school, optometrists typically complete four years of undergraduate study, culminating in a bachelor's degree. Required undergraduate coursework for pre-optometry students is extensive and covers a wide variety of advanced health, science and mathematics. Optometry school consists of four years of post-graduate, doctoral study concentrating on both the eye and systemic health. In addition to their formal training, doctors of optometry must undergo annual continuing education to stay current on the latest standards of care. For more information, visit [www.aoa.org](http://www.aoa.org).*

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