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Media Contact: Gwenne Hume, Ed.D.
303-863-9778

Step into Spring: Keeping an ‘Eye’ on Seasonal Allergies

Common medications and remedies don’t cut it for easing eye allergies

Denver, CO (April 1, 2010) – For most Americans, the start of spring is welcomed by thoughts of warmer weather, beautiful flowers and picnics in the park. But, for the 50 million Americans who suffer from allergies, the early signs of spring more closely resemble sneezing, coughing and itchy, watery eyes.

According to the Colorado Optometric Association, eye allergies, also called “allergic conjunctivitis,” are a reaction to indoor and outdoor allergens – pollen, mold, dust mites and pet dander – that get in the eyes and cause inflammation of the tissue that lines the inner eyelid.

While eye allergies can affect anyone, spring can be particularly hard on contact lens wearers. Extended wear time and infrequent lens replacement are two of the main reasons contact lens wearers face more prevalent symptoms. Dr. William J. Hoover, COA President, recommends contact lens wearers consider the following to make the spring season more comfortable:

- Reduce contact lens wearing time when possible.
- Talk to your optometrist about changing your cleaning method or using daily disposable contact lenses.
- Use eye drops as prescribed by a doctor of optometry.

When it comes to treating symptoms of allergies, the American Eye-Q®, a recent nationwide survey conducted by the American Optometric Association (AOA), found more than one-third (36 percent) of allergy sufferers use antihistamines or other medications to treat their symptoms. While antihistamines can help with typical symptoms like runny noses and sneezing, the medication can make ocular symptoms worse by reducing tear quality and quantity.

“To effectively treat and relieve the symptoms caused by eye allergies, patients should see their optometrist,” said Dr. Hoover “In most cases, we can soothe allergy-related conjunctivitis with prescriptions or over-the-counter eye drops depending on the patient and his or her medical history.”

While eye allergies can be a nuisance and affect job performance, as well as leisure and sporting activities, symptoms of allergies can be curtailed and prevented by following these recommendations from the Colorado Optometric Association:

- Don’t touch or rub your eyes.
- Wash hands often with soap and water.
- Wash bed linens and pillowcases in hot water and detergent to reduce allergens.
- Avoid sharing, and in some cases, wearing eye makeup.
- Never share contact lenses or contact lens cases with someone else.



Beyond discussing allergy relief with your optometrist, Colorado Optometric Association also recommends adults age 60 and under have a comprehensive eye exam at least every two years. Adults over age 60 should have eye exams annually. Based on an individual's eye health and the severity of their eye allergies, the eye doctor may recommend more frequent visits.

To find an optometrist in your area, or for additional information on how best to cope with seasonal allergies, please visit www.AOA.org or www.visioncare.org.

About the survey:

The fourth annual American Eye-Q® survey was created and commissioned in conjunction with Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates (PSB). From May 21 – 24, 2009, using an online methodology, PSB interviewed 1,000 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.

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