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SET YOUR SIGHTS ON SPRING EYE ALLERGY RELIEF

Common medications and remedies don't cut it; doctors of optometry offer tips for alleviating seasonal eye allergies.

ST. LOUIS, Mo. (April 5, 2011) - With the record-breaking cold and snow the country experienced this winter, spring will be a much welcomed relief. But, for many Americans who suffer from allergies, warmer weather brings the onset of sneezing, coughing and itchy, watery eyes.

According to the American Optometric Association (AOA), 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. Even if you don't generally experience problems wearing contacts throughout most of the year, allergy season can make contacts uncomfortable. Extended wear time and infrequent lens replacement are two of the main reasons contact lens wearers face more prevalent symptoms.

W. Lee Ball, O.D., staff optometrist, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, teaching hospital of Harvard Medical School, Boston, recommends contact lens wearers consider the following tips to make the spring season more comfortable:

- Talk to your optometrist about changing your cleaning method or using single-use contact lenses.
- If possible, reduce contact lens wearing time. Otherwise, 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 commissioned by the American Optometric Association, found almost half (44 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. Ball. "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."

Eye-Q® respondents also indicated that eye allergies can be a nuisance and interfere with participating in recreational outdoor activities (32 percent); sleep (29 percent) and the ability to think or concentrate (28 percent). Fortunately, eye allergies can be curtailed and sometimes even prevented by following these recommendations from the AOA:

- 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, the AOA also recommends adults have yearly eye exams. 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.

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.

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