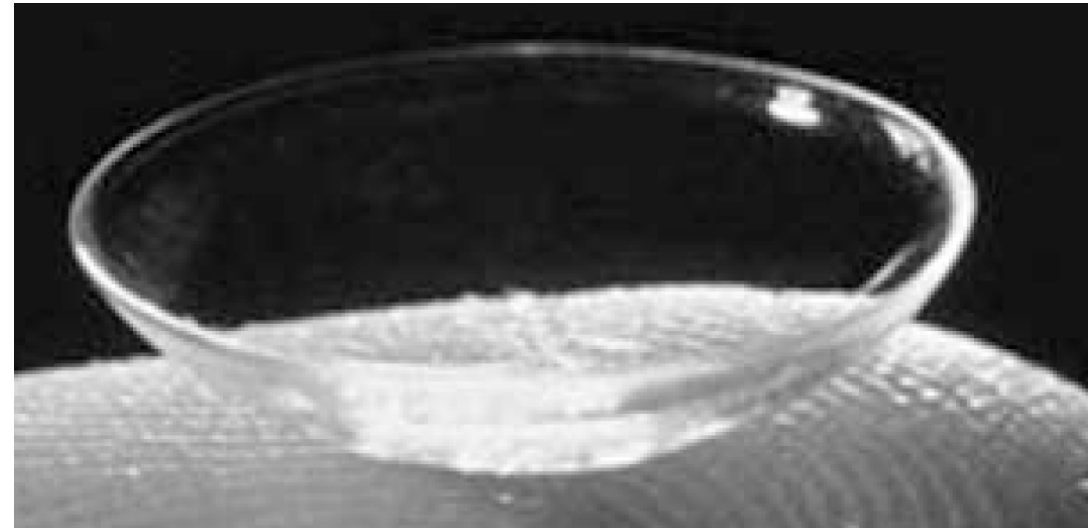


Additional Notes

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Contact lenses and eye infections



The Eye Unit

Information and advice for patients who wear Contact lenses and have an eye infection

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Do contact lenses cause infections?

Although contact lens wear is generally safe and comfortable, contact lens wearers are at a greater risk of eye infection and other problems. If you wear contact lenses, you owe it to yourself to take good care of your eyes and your lenses.

Contact lens wearers are also more likely to suffer from irritated eyes. In most cases the irritation comes from drying of the eye, rubbing of the lens against the eye, or reactions to the solutions used in lens care.

What is an eye infection?

Many people use the term “pink eye” to describe a bloodshot, irritated eye. This can be due to many things: Allergy, pollution, even a speck of dirt in the eye.

Sometimes the cause of a red looking eye is due to infection. This can be a serious problem, especially in contact lens wearers. An infection may cause pain, tissue swelling, blurred vision, and an oozing that forms a crust on eyelids and lashes.

An infection may affect the conjunctiva (the tissue that covers the white of the eye and the inside of the eyelids) or the cornea (the clear central “window” of the eye through which we see). Infection of the cornea is more serious than conjunctival infection.

Corneal infection is usually much more painful, and may cause blurred vision and sensitivity to light. If not treated quickly, corneal infection can cause scarring of the cornea and loss of vision.

Miss A Reid, Senior Optometrist, Bournemouth Hospital

0300 019 6032 (answerphone)

or

Emergency Helpline: 0300 019 4181

Mon-Sat: 8am-6pm

Sunday: 8:30am-2pm

and bank holidays: 8:30am-6pm

Remember...

- Always wash your hands before and after touching your eye/s
- Always finish the course of treatment if you have been prescribed medication, even if your symptoms have improved
- Always have regular eye checks with your Optometrist
- Always protect your eyes with goggles or glasses when carrying out DIY or using any power equipment
- If you splash anything into your eye always rinse with plenty of tap water and seek medical advice
- Never use anyone else’s medication (this includes eye-drops)

What can I do to reduce the risk of eye infections?

Always follow these guidelines for safe use of all types of contact lenses:

- Have regular eye examinations. Your practitioner will tell you if you are suitable for contact lens wear
- Lens fit is important. Your practitioner will take time to make sure your lenses fit properly. This can take several visits. This will ensure that your lenses fit correctly and provide the best possible vision and are not affecting the health of your eyes
- After fitting, you must keep all scheduled follow-up appointments
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and dry with a lint free towel before handling your lenses
- Unless you are taking new lenses from sealed packages, clean, rinse and disinfect your lenses each time before use. Make sure you know how to take care of your lenses; and follow your practitioner's directions. If you have a question, don't hesitate to ask
- Follow your practitioner's advice about how long you can wear your lenses for. Do not exceed the recommended number of hours you can wear your lenses. If you are on daily wear, do not sleep in your lenses
- If you wear disposable or frequent replacement lenses, be sure to replace them on schedule as prescribed

- Use the lens care solutions your practitioner recommends. Not all solutions work with each other; and some solutions can't be used with certain lenses. Never change solutions without checking with your practitioner
- When you take your lenses out of their case, rinse the case with saline and leave it open to air dry. Replace the case on a regular basis as instructed by your practitioner (three months is normally the longest a case should be used without being thrown away and replaced)
- Never use homemade saline or tap water that has not been boiled to rinse your lenses. We recommend using saline that is specially for use with contact lenses. You can buy this from your optician, pharmacy or supermarket
- Do not swim in contact lenses (discuss this issue further with your practitioner if you wear rigid or scleral contact lenses). Contact lenses should not be worn in hot tubs

What shall I do if I think I may have an eye infection?

An eye infection is an emergency. If you think you may have an eye infection:

- Remove your contact lens straight away
- For mild irritation wait a couple of hours after lens removal to see if your symptoms settle

If, after you remove your lens, your eye remains irritable and red, especially if your vision is blurred, or if you need further advice before re-wearing your lens please telephone on the number given.

Most importantly - don't delay

Prompt treatment gives the best chance for success in dealing with corneal infections.

Ask yourself these three questions, each time you wear your lenses:

1. Do my eyes look good?
2. Do my eyes feel good in my lenses?
3. Do I see well?

If no, please call us on the numbers provided overleaf.

In a few very rare cases the corneal infection can spread to the inside of the eye, causing blindness. Corneal infection must be taken seriously. Prompt diagnosis and treatment are very important.

Are some contact lenses safer than others?

Yes. It appears that rigid gas permeable lenses are a bit safer than soft lenses. However soft contact lenses are more comfortable to wear. Lenses that let plenty of oxygen through to the cornea are recommended. Soft lenses that have silicone in them are more oxygen permeable than those without.

The choice of lens is based on many factors, which your contact lens practitioner will discuss with you.

Wearing contact lenses during sleep (called extended wear or flexible wear) is also associated with a greater risk of corneal infection. Because of the added risk, you must discuss extended wear lenses with your practitioner before using them. It is important to balance the convenience and benefits of overnight wear against this risk.

Can I sleep with my lenses in?

Our advice is that you should not sleep with your lenses in unless there is a medical reason for this type of lens wear. If you need to wear contact lenses for medical reasons you would usually be under the care of the Eye unit rather than a high street optician.