

Information From Your Eye M.D.

EXTENDED-WEAR CONTACT LENSES

Background

Extended-wear contact lenses became popular during the 1970s and 80s until contact-lens wearers began having problems related to lens wear. Some of the problems included infections or ulcers on the cornea, the clear covering at the front of the eye. Corneal infections and corneal ulcers are serious, sight-threatening complications that happen more frequently, if you sleep in contact lenses. When scientists first studied extended-wear contact lenses, these complications did not seem to be a problem, but they later found they happened at least 10 times more often in people who slept in their lenses, instead of removing them each night. Popularity for extended wear-contact lenses decreased by the mid-1980s and most Eye M.D.s (ophthalmologists) stopped recommending them because of their risks.

However, surveys continue to show that people are interested in wearing safe extended-wear lenses, so scientists developed new materials for contact lenses to make extended wear safer. The new materials allow more oxygen to flow to the eye, allow tears to move more freely over the eye's surface and prevent the development of protein deposits. These improvements can reduce the risk of dryness in the eye, which can cause some of the more serious complications such as corneal infections or ulcers.

Safety Studies

Before the new materials could be used to make extended-wear contact lenses, scientists needed to study them to make sure they were safe. In two recent studies, results showed lenses made of a "hyper-oxygen transmissible" material, caused less bacterial binding (a main cause of complications associated with the lack of oxygen to the

cornea). This led scientists to believe that contact lenses made from materials that transmit high amounts of oxygen can be worn safely for up to 30 continuous days. Some contact lens manufacturers have recently received approval from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA— the government agency that oversees the safety of medical devices like contact lenses) on their 30-day extended-wear lenses.

Can I Wear My Contact Lenses For 30 Days?

Only if your Eye M.D. (ophthalmologist) or optometrist agrees they are safe can you wear contact lenses that have been approved for 30-day extended wear. Contact lenses are medical devices. The approval of the 30-day contact lens represents an important advance in contact lens technology. But extended-wear lenses aren't right for everybody. If you are interested in using extended-wear contact lenses, see your Eye M.D. or optometrist to be fitted with the right kind of lenses. He or she can also give you instructions on how to use, clean and store them safely. You'll also need to have regular eye exams to make sure your eyes are healthy so you can continue to wear lenses safely.

Where Can I Get More Information?

Your Eye M.D. is the best source of information on contact lenses, as well as eye health and safety.

If you would like more information on contact lenses, please visit the American Academy of Ophthalmology's public information Web site at www.medem.com/eyemd.

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