

Exercise caution with contact lenses

Dr Jacob Cheng, a senior consultant ophthalmologist, explains why prolonged contact lens wear may lead to severe problems such as a corneal ulcer



Prolonged contact lens wear may lead to mild conditions such as dry eyes and droopy eyelids or more serious ones such as corneal ulcers. PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

Singapore has a high incidence of myopia, and many people use contact lenses to help correct their vision.

If worn for an extended period of time and with poor hygiene, it may lead to infections and other serious problems, notes Dr Jacob Cheng from Eagle Eye Centre. He shares more on the consequences of prolonged contact lens wear.

Q I am a 42-year-old working professional who has been experiencing problems with my vision. My doctor suspects that it is a corneal ulcer due to prolonged contact lens wear. What are some of the risks of wearing contact lenses?

Contact lens wear comes with some amount of risk. Dry eyes, droopy eyelids and corneal abrasions are common complications of prolonged wear.

In general, contact lenses prevent adequate moisture and lubrication of our eyes, especially to the surface of the cornea. This can damage the corneal surface, increasing the chances of abrasions and potentially serious eye infections.

Other complications include corneal neovascularisation, where limited oxygen supply to the eye causes new blood vessels to grow on the corneal surface. Over time, these vessels enlarge, invading the central cornea, and causing severe red eyes and eventual vision loss.

Some may also develop a corneal ulcer or infectious keratitis. This results from abrasion, trauma, poor lens hygiene, contaminated lenses and overuse. It may lead to severe loss of vision or blindness, if left untreated.

Q What are some symptoms of a corneal ulcer?
 You may start experiencing some sensitivity to light, tearing, redness and discharge. From there, it may progress to severe pain, white patches on the cornea and reduced vision.

Corneal ulcers may lead to eventual blindness.

Other consequences include corneal scars and poor vision that cannot be corrected with glasses. Even corneal transplants may not completely restore vision.

Q How can a corneal ulcer be treated? Am I able to continue wearing contact lenses?

Corneal ulcers require treatment with extensive antibiotics. Serious cases may require hospitalisation.

Corneal scars can still form after treatment and may require a corneal transplant to recover some vision.

A person who has developed a corneal ulcer is at greater risk of developing it again and patients should discontinue wearing contact lenses.

Q What are some eye care tips for contact lens users?

Good hygiene is critical. For a start, do not bathe or sleep with contact lenses as these activities may lead to a higher risk of infectious keratitis.

Daily disposable contacts lenses are thus recommended for good hygiene purposes.

If there is discomfort, redness, excessive tearing and blurring of vision, stop wearing the lenses and discard them immediately. Always have a backup pair of glasses.

A fresh pair of contact lenses can be worn only a few days after recovery. If symptoms persist, consult an eye specialist immediately.



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