



Red eye from prolonged contact lens use

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Q I am in my 20s and work as a pre-school teacher. I have been wearing contact lenses since I was 13 years old. I wear monthly disposable soft lenses as I have sensitive eyes.

Recently, I have noticed that whenever I wear my contact lenses, the side of my right eye will start to turn pink or red after a few hours.

This has been happening even though I have not been rubbing my eyes and have been observing proper contact lens and eye care habits.

My left eye does not have such a reaction to the lenses.

When I asked my optometrist about the reddening of my right eye, I was told that my right eye was more sensitive than my left one.

I do not have dry eyes, although I have been advised to use both regular eye drops and eye drops for contact lens users once a day by my optometrist.

I previously developed an allergy to the contact lens solution I was using in 2004 and had to switch to another solution under the advice of my optometrist.

I have since not had any eye problems, until now.

What should I do to reduce the reddening of my right eye?

My friends have suggested that I use eye whitening eye drops or go for Lasik. I am considering giving up my contact lenses and relying on my spectacles instead.

However, as I have to be on the go often while working, I find wearing spectacles a hassle.

What would you advise?

A It seems to me that you may have a condition called "contact lens overwear syndrome".

This condition is common in people who have been using contact lenses for a long time or in people who overextend the wearing time of their contact lenses.

The condition occurs because the contact lens damages the cornea of the eye by reducing the amount of oxygen reaching the anterior (front) cornea surface and causing microabrasions.

In serious cases, this can lead to bacterial infections, causing cornea ulcers that may be potentially blinding.

In such cases, patients will usually experience severe pain, photophobia (intolerance to light where exposure to light causes the eye to be painful) and blurring of vision.

To reduce the reddening of your right eye, I would advise that you stop using contact lenses for at least one to two months and use preservative-free artificial tears.

Eye whitening eye drops, or decongestant eye drops, work by constricting the blood vessels in the eye and making them less visible.

So the use of such eye drops does not address the underlying problem and is only a temporary solution.

Lasik is a procedure in which an excimer laser is used to remove tissue from the cornea to reshape it and correct its refractive error.

If you are keen on Lasik, you should see an ophthalmologist to assess your suitability before making a decision.

If there is a need for you to wear contact lenses, you may want to consider switching to rigid gas permeable lenses that have better oxygen permeability than monthly disposable soft lenses.

However, there is still a need to ensure you do not wear the contact lenses for more than eight hours at a stretch and do not wear the lenses to sleep or swim. You also have to maintain proper contact lens hygiene.

If the symptoms persist, you should consider seeing an ophthalmologist for further evaluation.



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