




Microbial keratitis


WHAT IS YOUR RISK?

Almost 700,000 people in Australia wear contact lenses, and perhaps 100 million around the world.

Contact lens related corneal infections are rare, and affect approximately 5 in 10,000 contact lens wearers annually.


However these infections can have serious outcomes such as permanent vision loss and in severe cases, blindness. The study found that loss of vision from corneal infection occurs in almost 1 in 10,000 contact lens wearers annually. 

HOW CAN YOU REDUCE YOUR RISK?

You can significantly reduce your risk of infection by following good lens care and hygiene practices. Remember that a contact lens is a foreign body placed in your eye, and you need to take care to make sure it stays uncontaminated. 

HYGIENE


Hygiene is vitally important to preventing infection.

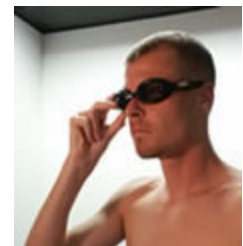
- Always wash and rinse your hands thoroughly before handling your lenses. In the study, simple measures such as hand-washing prior to touching contact lenses were found to significantly reduce the likelihood of getting an infection. Alarmingly, the study shows that 25% of patients didn't always wash their hands, and 12% never washed their hands before handling lenses.
- Don't soak or rinse your lenses in tap water or saline, use fresh lens disinfecting solution.
- Don't place a lens in your mouth for cleaning or wetting.
- Clean your lenses on a regular basis as indicated by your eyecare practitioner.
- Discard all solutions one month after opening, even if there is still solution remaining.
- Clean your lens storage case in warm soapy water at least once a week, and leave to air-dry with the lid off every day.
- Replace your lens case every month (new lens cases are often sold as a package with bottles of solution). 



SWIMMING

Wear good fitting goggles if you go swimming with your contact lenses.


If you have gone swimming without goggles, make sure you remove and thoroughly clean and disinfect your lenses at the first opportunity before re-inserting them. 



SLEEPING IN LENSES

An important finding of the study is that sleeping in contact lenses continues to be a major risk factor for corneal infection, even for high oxygen permeable materials.

Patients considering the convenience of extended wear lenses should realise that they increase their chances of getting a corneal infection by 4-7 times if they sleep in their contact lenses.


If you have extended wear lenses, lower your risk by maintaining good hygiene, and follow your eyecare practitioner's advice as to lens wear and replacement schedules. In particular, don't sleep in your lenses if there is any discomfort. 

SLEEPING IN LENSES IF YOU ARE UNWELL

If you have extended wear lenses, you should avoid wearing them overnight if you are unwell, as this can have an impact on how your eyes cope with contact lenses.


If you have a cold, flu, sinusitis, gastroenteritis, fever, or are feeling generally unwell or rundown, we strongly advise that you do not sleep in your lenses. If the illness is severe, all contact lens wear should be suspended.



The lenses should be cleaned after removal and stored in fresh disinfecting solution. If the lenses are stored for more than five days, they should be re-cleaned and disinfected prior to reuse. Alternatively, they should be discarded and new lenses inserted when you have recovered from illness. 

TAKE CARE WHEN TRAVELLING


Many people relax their usual hygiene routines when they travel. Make sure that you have enough solution, a clean case and spare pair of glasses whenever you travel.

If there is a problem, don't wait until you get home - see an eyecare practitioner as soon as possible. 




SEEK PROFESSIONAL ADVICE

Contact lenses are a medical device and it is important that you get the right advice in selecting and caring for your lenses.

The study found that those who developed infections were five times more likely to have purchased their contact lenses over the internet, highlighting the importance of professional advice on contact lens prescribing, care and maintenance. 

DON'T BECOME COMPLACENT

It is easy to relax when you have worn contact lenses for some time. You need to maintain hygiene and general care of your lenses to ensure that your risk of corneal infection remains low. 

TYPES OF LENSES

Daily disposable contact lenses (lenses worn once and thrown away) or rigid gas permeable contact lenses worn daily, were shown to have the lowest risk of infection, approximately 1 in 10,000.

New highly oxygen permeable soft lenses have provided certain ocular health benefits, however, the risk of infection remains higher in extended wear regardless of the lens material.


All forms of vision correction, including refractive surgery, carry some risk of problems that could lead to reduction of visual acuity. Individuals should discuss the risks and benefits of all vision correction alternatives with their eyecare practitioner.



WHAT YOU SHOULD DO EVERY DAY

When you are wearing your contact lenses, check every day and ask:

1. Do my eyes LOOK good?
2. Do my eyes FEEL good?
3. Do my eyes SEE well?

If there are ANY problems, if your eyes are red, watering, uncomfortable or painful; remove the lenses AND contact your eyecare practitioner as soon as possible. 




WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Some of the signs and symptoms of adverse reactions to your contact lenses can be subtle, and your vigilance and prompt action is important to minimise the risks. By regularly checking the condition of your eyes any problems can be

quickly assessed and treated.

The most important things you should check for each day are:



- **Redness:** A red eye indicates an irritated eye. You may not feel any discomfort so always check in the mirror. Compare the eyes - increased redness in one eye is highly suspicious and should be checked at once.
- **Watering:** This is typically associated with discomfort, but not always.
- **Light sensitivity:** Most contact lens wearers find their eyes are slightly more sensitive to light at first. You may need to wear sunglasses more often. However be cautious if you notice a sudden increase in the sensitivity of your eyes to light.
- **Discomfort:** Never ignore discomfort in your eyes. Some things like a speck of dust or lint under the lens can be easily removed by sliding a soft contact lens onto the white part of the eye or by removing, rinsing and reinserting the lens. More serious problems will cause a progressive increase in discomfort. The sooner this is assessed and treated the better. 

WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE TRAVELLING

Maintain lens hygiene. Take sufficient lens solutions, as well as a clean lens case and spare pair of glasses in case of problems.

Don't wait until you get home to see a practitioner if you suspect there is a problem. 