

Children and Contact Lenses:

Is Your Child Ready to Wear Contacts?

By Carole Hong, OD

Parents are often asked, or even begged by their children for the right to trade in their glasses for contact lenses. What do you say? When should you say yes?

The next question is usually, “Are contact lenses appropriate, or even safe, for my child to wear?” The good news is that research shows that contact lens wear is safe when appropriate care is followed for a child of any age. This care would include following the prescribed cleaning and disinfecting procedures, seeing your eye care professional on a regular basis to ensure long term health, as well as not engaging in unsafe activities such as swapping lenses with others or wearing them longer than prescribed.

It’s not a matter so much of age as a matter of maturity. Many infants and toddlers successfully wear contact lenses, as their parents are responsible for their care, while there are teenagers and even some adults who probably shouldn’t be wearing lenses.

Research Says Contacts are Okay for Eight-Year-Olds

New research suggests that 8- to 11-year-olds can handle the responsibility of contact lenses just as well as their older peers. Children as young as eight can successfully wear contacts without relying on their parents to put them in and take them out.

And, thanks to daily disposable lenses, you don’t have to worry about supervising your child in cleaning their lenses every evening. Daily disposable lenses eliminate the need

for cleaning and disinfecting, which improves compliance and comfort, while providing a healthier option for the eyes. You can rest assured your child will have fresh, clean lenses to wear each day!

There are several reasons why a child may want to wear contact lenses. Improved physical appearance, acceptance among friends, and ability to play sports are often cited as top reasons for children to wear contact lenses. Like adults, children feel less self-conscious when glasses aren’t perched on their noses. Wearing contacts improves their own perception of their appearance. Often children who are normally shy aren’t so once they start wearing contacts. When a child feels good about himself, he’s likely to be more outgoing and active with his peers. Where social acceptance is a top-rated commodity for children and particularly teenagers, wearing contacts is a healthy option that can provide a big boost.

Improve Athletic Performance and Eye Safety with Contact Lenses

Glasses should not be worn during sports participation, especially in those sports that involve balls, racquets, or flying objects. Even if your child has polycarbonate or trivex eyeglass lenses, if the frame breaks, it can cause a sight-threatening injury. With contacts, he or she can easily wear a protective helmet or goggles.

Better peripheral (side) vision with contact lenses will allow for better awareness of space and enhance athletic performance. Other important visual skills for sports

include dynamic visual acuity, visual concentration, eye tracking, eye-hand-body coordination, visual memory, visual reaction time, depth perception, and visualization. To find out more about sports vision therapy and improving your visual skills to improve your game at any age, visit www.aoa.org/sports-vision.xml.

Getting Contacts for the First Time

While getting contacts for your child can be a little scary, especially for parents who are not contact lens wearers themselves, just as with anything in life, with the proper parental support (and an optometric office that is comfortable working with kids), your child will be successful and enjoy the benefits of contact lenses right from the start. Talk with your eye care professional who can help you decide when to say “yes” and what the best option is for your child so that he can have optimal vision in school, sports, and life.

For more information on children and contact lenses, children’s vision, or sports vision, please visit our Web site at www.FamilyVisionCare.org or contact Carole L. Hong, OD, Kristina Stasko, OD, or Macson Y. Lee, OD, at (650) 593-1661.

Carole L. Hong, OD, FCOVD, board certified in vision development, has been practicing in San Carlos for over 15 years. She is an expert in children’s vision, vision and learning, and treatment of vision problems for those with autism spectrum disorders, other developmental disabilities, head injury, and stroke. Dr. Hong practices with Drs. Kristina Stasko and Macson Lee, also developmental optometrists. They can be reached at (650) 593.1661 or email@familyvisioncare.org.