



Health and Wellness News Winter 2008-2009

Celebrate the Holidays with Safe Toys

The holiday season is the time to celebrate with friends and family. Unfortunately, it is also a time for eye injuries from unsafe toys and other holiday-related activities.

So, before you head to the mall or go online, remember to make sure that the gift you purchase will be a safe one. Unfortunately, thousands of children are injured every year by toys. In 2005, the Consumer Product Safety Commission estimated that over 200,000 children were treated in the emergency room for toy-related injuries. And nearly 8,000 of those injuries were to the eyes. The types of eye injuries consisted of lacerations, abrasions and foreign bodies.

Not all injuries are caused by defective toys or products. Children receive all sorts of potentially unsafe presents during the holidays, including BB guns, darts and sports equipment. In fact, these items accounted for a large portion of the documented injuries to children's eyes. Any toys that shoot projectiles are always dangerous. Even common products such as pens, pencils, crayons and other art supplies, were involved in many accidents.

Parents should always check toy labels for age recommendations and select gifts that are appropriate for a child's age and maturity. Avoid purchasing toys with sharp, protruding or projectile parts. It is also essential to make sure children have appropriate supervision when playing with potentially hazardous toys or games that could cause injury.

This year have a safe and happy holiday season!!

Glaucoma Awareness

Glaucoma is an eye disease that can lead to blindness if not treated. While there is no cure for glaucoma, there are effective treatments that can save your sight. If you have glaucoma, it is necessary to have regular follow up visits to your eye doctor. The purpose of these visits is to make sure that your glaucoma is well controlled and not getting worse.

Glaucoma gets worse very slowly, and there are no symptoms that you can detect to tell if your glaucoma is getting worse. So regular visits, at least 2-3 every year are very important. During these visits you will likely undergo a number of tests evaluating the status of your glaucoma.

At every visit, your eye pressure will be measured. High eye pressure is thought to play a role in the damage that destroys vision. The goal of glaucoma treatment is to lower eye pressure. This is usually achieved with eye drop medications. Checking your eye pressure at each visit lets your doctor know if your drugs are still working effectively.

Occasionally, your doctor will dilate your pupils to carefully examine your optic nerves. The optic nerve connects the eye to the brain, and is the structure that is damaged in glaucoma. When the optic nerve is damaged by glaucoma, you gradually lose your peripheral vision. You may also have a computerized optic nerve scan. The purpose of this is to measure the amount of glaucoma damage you have, and to determine if your glaucoma is stable or is getting worse. If it is getting worse, your doctor will change your treatment to further lower your eye pressure.

Since optic nerve damage destroys your peripheral vision, you will periodically take a visual field test to measure your peripheral vision. If your glaucoma is continuing to steal your peripheral vision over time, your doctor will again change your treatment to further lower your eye pressure.

These various tests are all necessary to make sure that your eye pressure has been lowered enough to stop glaucoma from stealing your sight. Keeping your appointments faithfully, and using your eye drop medications regularly as prescribed, are important in keeping your glaucoma under control and saving your sight.



Teens & Contacts: A Guide for Parents

How old do you have to be to wear contact lenses? There is no age limit: babies can wear them, and so can seniors. Most eyecare professionals begin to encourage contact lens wear when their patients are between ages 11 and 14. The real issue for a teenager is not age, but whether he is responsible enough to wear and care for his contact lenses properly. Parents, teens, and their eyecare practitioner must make this decision together.

Another age-related issue is that teens are self-conscious beings, and they often feel more attractive and accepted if they don't have a pair of eyeglasses in front of their eyes. Contact lenses can help teens feel greater self-esteem.

Do contact lenses require much care? Cleaning regimens are much easier now than they used to be. Usually they require just one bottle of solution and a case. Of course, one type of contact lens, daily disposable, doesn't need a cleaning regimen, because the lenses are tossed in the trash at the end of each day. For this reason, daily disposable contacts are probably the best vision correction option for most teens.

For contacts that do require care, many eyecare practitioners report that teens and children are more diligent about cleaning their contact lenses than are adults, who after years of wearing them often become more casual about lens care. And young people are more careful about following directions given them by a medical professional. They also tend to stick to the recommended brands of cleaning solutions, instead of switching to a possibly incompatible brand.

You do need a prescription to order contact lenses. The Food and Drug Administration classifies contact lenses as a medical device. Contacts must fit properly on the eye. If they don't, serious eye health issues can result. That's why they must be fitted by an eyecare practitioner, who will write a prescription for the proper size, shape,



power, and brand of lenses. By law, you need a prescription in order to purchase contact lenses, and this is true even if you're buying color contacts or special effect contacts for cosmetic reasons only. A contact lens fitting is painless and takes very little time. It can be done in conjunction with a regular eye exam.

Modern contact lenses are designed to be very comfortable. Most are made of a soft material that is hardly noticeable, if at all, once the lenses are placed on the eyes. Eyecare practitioners have very sophisticated tools for measuring the eyes and making sure the lenses fit well.

Some people wonder if it will hurt to put contact lenses in their eyes for the first time. This fear is understandable, and it's related to the reluctance they may have to touch their eyes. But after learning how to insert and remove their lenses, most people find it very easy and completely painless.

After wearing their contacts for a while, some people may experience eye dryness. This usually occurs with older people, not teens. In any case, mild dryness can usually be alleviated with lens rewetting drops. Your eyecare practitioner will advise you on the best drops to use with certain lens brands.

Another source of discomfort can be dirt or allergens that stick to the lenses. But taking proper care of them and cleaning them thoroughly normally prevents this. Of course, this is not a concern with daily disposables because any accumulated allergens or other lens deposits are discarded with the lens each night.

As far as safety, contact lenses may be safer than eyeglasses in most situations for teens. This is because they are very unlikely to break during activities such as football, basketball, and other rough sports. Plus, if a sport requires safety goggles or ski goggles, it is more convenient and comfortable to wear them over contact lenses than over eyeglasses.

Safety is enhanced also because of the superior peripheral vision that contact lenses provide and because they don't fog up or distort vision. So teens can see when a racquet or ball is coming toward them. For questions or additional information please ask your eye doctor.

