

EYE ON HEALTH

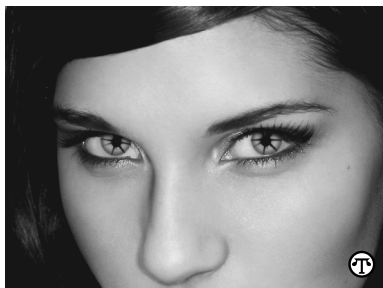
Don't Get Contact Lenses Without A Prescription

(NAPSA)—While decorative contact lenses are a popular way to change one's eye color or complement a costume, the American Optometric Association (AOA) warns there are risks of wearing these contact lenses without a prescription from an eye doctor. The noncorrective lenses are designed only to change the appearance of the eyes and are, unfortunately, easily accessible to consumers.

According to the AOA, only a proper medical evaluation from an optometrist can determine whether people are viable candidates to wear contact lenses, that the lenses fit properly and if a person can wear lenses without problems.

Federal law requires the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to regulate decorative lenses as a medical device, similar to corrective lenses; however, decorative lenses continue to be illegally marketed and distributed directly to consumers through a variety of sources including flea markets, the Internet, beauty salons and convenience stores.

Purchasing contact lenses without a prescription can result in serious eye health and vision damage, since wearers have not been properly educated on cleaning and disinfecting, and in proper removal and application of the contact lens, states the AOA. Without a prescription and wearing instructions from an optometrist, consumers who wear these contact lenses put themselves at risk of serious bacterial infection or even significant damage to the eye's



ability to function, with the potential for irreversible sight loss.

This warning comes at a time of heightened consumer interest in changing one's eye color. New results from the AOA's American Eye-Q® survey indicate that more than half of all Americans would consider changing the color of their eyes with colored lenses.

Other risks associated with the improper use of decorative contact lenses include conjunctivitis, swelling, allergic reaction and corneal abrasion due to poor lens fit. Additional medical problems may result in a reduction of visual acuity (sight), contrast sensitivity and other general eye and vision impairments.

Even though decorative contact lenses carry no prescription and may be worn for short periods of time, they carry the same risks as corrective contact lenses. The AOA advises consumers using these lenses to familiarize themselves with the information available from their eye doctor, so as to reduce the risk of infection.

Recommendations For Decorative Contact Lens Wearers

1. Always see an optometrist for a prescription and proper fitting.
2. Always wash your hands before handling contact lenses.
3. Carefully and regularly clean contact lenses, as directed by your optometrist. Rub the contact lenses with fingers and rinse thoroughly before soaking lenses overnight in sufficient multipurpose solution to completely cover the lens.
4. Store lenses in the proper lens storage case and replace the case at a minimum of every three months. Clean the case after each use, and keep it open and dry between cleanings.
5. Use only products recommended by your optometrist to clean and disinfect your lenses. Saline solution and rewetting drops are not designed to disinfect lenses.
6. Only fresh solution should be used to clean and store contact lenses. Never reuse old solution. Contact lens solution must be changed according to the manufacturer's recommendations, even if the lenses are not used daily.
7. Always follow the recommended contact lens replacement schedule prescribed by your optometrist.
8. Remove contact lenses before swimming or entering a hot tub.
9. See your optometrist for your regularly scheduled contact lens and eye examination.

For more information about decorative contact lenses and to find additional resources pertaining to contact lens hygiene and compliance, visit www.aoa.org.