

# Contact lenses a good choice for children 12 and younger

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Children 8 to 12 years old are just as adept as teenagers at handling and wearing contact lenses.

"Optometrists traditionally don't prescribe contact lenses to children until they are at least 12 years old," said Jeffrey Walline, an assistant professor of optometry at Ohio State University. "But we found that younger children are just as responsible with their lenses."

He and his colleagues studied 169 children and teenagers who participated in the Contact Lens in Pediatrics (CLIP) study, which compares contact lens wear in children 8 to 12 with teens 13 to 17. About half the participants were in each group.

The researchers presented their findings from the month-long study on December 8 in Denver at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Optometry. The current findings confirm those of a much smaller study conducted by Walline and others, which suggested that children 8 to 12 could easily handle daily disposable contact lenses.

None of the children or teens in the current study had worn contact lenses prior to the study. The researchers gave each participant a three-month supply of disposable soft contact lenses, instructing the children and teens to take the lenses out each night and to throw each pair away after two weeks.

Each participant answered questions on the Pediatric Refractive Error

Profile (PREP), a survey containing quality-of-life questions related to wearing contact lenses and glasses. The children and teens filled out the profile before they began to wear contact lenses, and again one month after wearing the lenses. PREP scores range from 100 (excellent quality of life) to 0 (poor quality of life.)

Questions included how much a child or teen liked wearing contact lenses or glasses, how clear her vision was while wearing the lenses or glasses, what her eyes physically felt like when wearing lenses or glasses, friends' reactions to the change and how easy the contact lenses were to handle.

PREP scores suggested that the children and teens were more satisfied with wearing contact lenses than with wearing glasses: scores rose from 65 (pre-contact lens wear) to 74.5 for children, and from 63 (pre-contact lens wear) to 73 for teens.

"The biggest boosts were in terms of satisfaction with their correction and also with participation in activities," Walline said. "Children and teens reported that it was much easier to engage in sports, dancing and other activities while wearing contact lenses."

The researchers noted that there was little change in participants' feelings toward their own appearance, nor did peer perceptions seem to change dramatically once a child or teen began wearing contact lenses.

"Vanity doesn't seem to be a factor in children's or teens' satisfaction with switching to contact lenses," Walline said.

Children wore their lenses almost as long as teens – parents reported that their children wore the contact lenses about 10.5 hours a day, while teens wore their lenses about 11.5 hours each day.

The soft disposable contact lenses used in this study, along with the necessary cleaning solutions, can cost roughly \$260 a year, said Walline. Since children's and teens' vision can change very fast, such lenses are typically sold in a six-month supply. Adults can buy a one-year supply.

Walline and his colleagues are currently analyzing data gathered from the study participants after three months of wearing the contact lenses. Although that data isn't included in this presentation, Walline said the findings are very similar to what he and his colleagues found at the one-month point.

"Children are very capable of taking care of contact lenses on their own," he said.

In related work, Walline and his colleagues found that optometrists initially spend about 14 minutes longer fitting a child with contact lenses and teaching him how to insert and remove those lenses (total exam time was 110 minutes for children and 96 minutes for teens.)

"After the training is complete, children and teens both showed excellent understanding of contact lens care," Walline said.

Source: Ohio State University

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