

Kids with contact lenses like their looks better than kids with glasses

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Children wearing contact lenses felt better about how they look, their athletic abilities and acceptance by their friends than did children wearing eyeglasses in a recent study.

The results suggest that nearsighted children as young as 8 years old reap social benefits from wearing contact lenses instead of glasses, researchers say.

In general, eye care practitioners in the United States tend to wait to prescribe contact lenses until children are in their early teens. But nearsighted children often are diagnosed with myopia and receive their first corrective lenses around age 8.

The study was designed to examine the effects of contact lenses vs. eyeglasses on a number of kids' perceptions about themselves, especially what is called their global self-worth, or how valuable they think they are to society.

The research indicated that children's global self-worth was not significantly affected by whether they wore contact lenses or eyeglasses. Similarly, the type of vision correction had no effect on how they felt they performed in school or how they perceived their own behavior.

"The effects really seem to be in areas that we would think made sense - how they feel about their appearance, athletic abilities and what their friends think of them," said Jeffrey Walline, assistant professor of

optometry at Ohio State University and lead author of the study.

The research is published in the March issue of the journal *Optometry and Vision Science*.

The study was conducted at five clinical centers in the United States that enrolled a total of 484 nearsighted children between the ages of 8 and 11. Of those, 237 were randomly assigned to wear eyeglasses and the other 247 were randomly assigned disposable soft contact lenses for the three-year duration of the trial.

Before assigning corrective lenses for the study, the researchers surveyed the participants to determine whether they had low or high satisfaction with the eyeglasses they had been wearing before the study began. This was done to determine whether previous unhappiness with eyeglasses might influence how the children with contact lenses perceived themselves.

"We thought kids who hated wearing glasses would have a lot greater benefit from contact lens wear than kids who thought glasses were perfectly fine," Walline said. "Overall, across the scale, it didn't seem to have much of an effect. But what that tells us is that, regardless of what kids think of their glasses, they seem to benefit from contact lens wear in these three specific areas."

Though the participating children's global self worth scores increased across the board over the course of the study, there was no significant difference in overall self-worth between the two treatment groups.

However, on average, contact lens wearers reported better perceptions about their own appearance than did kids wearing eyeglasses.

"The largest difference between the treatment groups was for physical

appearance, regardless of whether they initially liked wearing glasses," Walline said. "This indicates that children's physical appearance self-perception is likely to improve with contact lens wear, even if they don't mind wearing glasses."

While children's perceptions about their ability to play sports varied over the three years, over the duration of the study, in general, the kids with contact lenses felt better about their athletic competitiveness than did kids wearing eyeglasses.

The children with contact lenses also felt they were more accepted by their friends than did those wearing eyeglasses. But over the course of the trial, both treatment groups experienced an overall increase in their social acceptance scores.

One area that was affected by how kids previously felt about eyeglasses was scholastic competence. Children who had disliked their glasses and were then assigned contact lenses for the study ended up feeling more confident about their school performance.

Walline said the study suggests that even young children should be given the option to select contact lenses over glasses.

"Kids, in consultation with parents, should be able to choose what kind of vision correction they want," he said. "Age should not be the determining factor for whether a child receives contact lenses or eyeglasses. Look at a child's motivation, abilities, maturity, hygiene, eye size - lots of those factors - but don't look at age. There are 6-year-olds who can wear contact lenses on their own and there are 25-year-olds who can't."

Source: Ohio State University

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