

Should my child get contact lenses? Pediatric ophthalmologist offers advice

August 30 2024, by Douglas R. Fredrick MD, FAAP, American Academy of Pediatrics



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For children with poor vision caused by refractive errors (problems with

focusing), glasses are often the first choice. But many young people who play sports, might prefer contacts, since they don't break or fall off as easily as eyeglasses. In some cases, eye doctors may recommend contacts to slow the progression of nearsightedness in children aged 8 to 12.

Contact lenses are thin, clear plastic disks that float on the tear film on the eye. Like eyeglasses, they correct blurry [vision](#) that happens when the eye does not bend or focus light properly. Contacts can be used to correct nearsightedness (myopia), farsightedness (hyperopia) and distorted vision due to astigmatism ("football shaped eyes").

There are two types of contact lenses a eye doctor might recommend: [soft contact lenses](#), which are flexible and foldable, or rigid gas permeable contact lenses, which are made from stiff plastic that cannot be folded.

While rigid gas-permeable lenses are a good choice for children with high amounts of astigmatism, most children prefer soft lenses for comfort and convenience.

Daily wear contacts can be put in when a child wakes up and stored or even tossed away at bedtime. Extended-wear contact lenses (lenses you can sleep in overnight) also are approved for use, but most ophthalmologists do not recommend them. This is because extended wear lenses are associated with a higher risk of eye infections that can cause permanent damage to vision.

Most eye care professionals agree that children as young as 8 years old can safely use contact lenses. By this age, [children](#) can learn care routines that prevent eye infections and other concerns relating to contacts.

A child may be ready for contact lenses if they can easily follow

directions and build new skills; do daily tasks without reminders; learn to keep lenses clean; follow a regular wear schedule; and handle lenses carefully so they don't break or tear.

Contact lenses do come with certain risks. The most common concerns are eye infections such as keratitis. With keratitis, the cornea—the clear, dome-shaped surface of the eye—becomes infected. Keratitis can scar the cornea, harming vision.

Children who wear contacts can also develop conjunctivitis, or pink eye. This happens when the [blood vessels](#) in the membrane that lines the eyelid and eyeball become swollen and irritated.

A few simple steps and routines can reduce the chances a child will develop serious eye problems from contact use.

Since contact lenses can easily be lost or torn, it's smart to keep a pair of regular glasses on hand. This way, the child will be able to see well during school, sports practice or other activities while new lenses are on order.

Children must ask for help if they experience eye pain or discomfort, excess tearing or eye discharge, unusual sensitivity to light, itching, burning, swelling or grittiness, or blurred vision.

Children should not wear their friends' contacts or loan theirs to anyone else. Sharing contact lenses can raise the chances of infections that can cause serious vision problems. Decorative contact lenses like those sold online during Halloween can harm eyes. Only wear contact lenses prescribed and dispensed by an eye care professional.

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