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INFORMATION FROM YOUR PEDIATRICIAN

Only buy decorative lenses with a prescription

Teens may be anxious to buy decorative contact lenses to make a fashion statement or as a Halloween costume accessory. But they may not realize they need a prescription and must be fitted by an eye care professional.



When 14-year-old Robyn and her friends saw decorative contact lenses for sale at a convenience store, they thought they would be a fun way to change their looks. Unfortunately, Robyn ended up with a serious eye infection. When her eye healed, the scar left her partially blind. She had to have surgery on her eye to be able to see again.

“All contact lenses have risk, corrective or decorative,” said Thomas Steinemann, M.D., the eye doctor who treated Robyn. “The risk is infection. The risk is increased if you don’t take care of your lenses; the risk is increased if you sleep in your lenses; the risk is increased if you share your lenses.”

Actors and musicians with decorative contact lenses are everywhere, it seems. From Lady Gaga to Twilight, changing the look of their eyes with decorative contact lenses is the latest craze. As Halloween nears, costume shops begin to sell the contacts, too. There are plenty of styles to choose from: colored lenses, shapes, spirals, even white. But most people do not know that these lenses are not legal. They have dye in them that can cause problems. One size does not fit everyone. This can stop air from getting to the eye, and trap germs underneath.

Anyone who wants to wear decorative lenses should get them from an eye care professional and be measured first. The eye doctor will write a prescription for lenses that are made to fit your eyes. These contacts are approved by the Food and Drug Administration. Contacts that are bought from a store or online without a prescription are not. Wearing these decorative contacts can cause:

- a scratched eye (corneal abrasion),
- infections from bacteria, viruses, parasites or fungi, and
- allergic reactions.

Some problems can cause blindness in hours.

Parents should keep an eye on any child who wears contacts, decorative or prescription. Problems include redness and pain, light sensitivity, and tearing or drainage from the eye, said Dr. Steinemann. “If it hurts, get it out and see an eye care professional right away.”

— Trisha Koriath

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