

# Children can wear contact lenses

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**A new study by American optometrists has shown that short-sighted children as young as eight can benefit from wearing contact lenses as opposed to spectacles.**

A report published in the US journal, *Optometry and Vision Science*, states that the children in the study enjoyed the same benefits of contact lens wear as teenage children, and ranked especially highly the same improvements in quality of life as other older lens wearers do, namely:

- their ability to participate in activities, such as sport and dancing,
- their appearance
- their satisfaction with their vision correction.

In other words young children have the same concerns over their method of vision correction as the rest of us; they care about their appearance and feel that contact lenses make them look better. They recognise that the use of contact lenses, as opposed to spectacles, frees them to enjoy themselves more through the physical activities that play such a significant role in the lives of most children in this age group. Furthermore, they feel that the quality of vision provided by contact lenses is better than that provided by spectacles.

The Study involved almost 500 children, between the ages of 8 and 12 and located at five sites across North America. The children had moderate myopia (between -1 and -6 dioptres) and were randomly assigned spectacles or contact lenses. Other studies have previously shown that children are capable of wearing contact lenses in terms of their ability to stick to the required hygiene regimes; to insert and remove lenses safely; and to wear lenses comfortably. This study is the first to concentrate on the children's vision-related quality of life rather than the safety of contact lens wear for such young users.

The children's experience of contact lens wear was compared to that of those wearing spectacles across eleven different attributes, showing significant improvement in ten of the eleven at the end of the 3 year study. It is interesting to see that the improvements were noticed by the children after only one month and remained consistent until the end of the study. Along with high scores in the categories Activities, Appearance, and Satisfaction with Correction, the contact lens wearing children were also significantly pleased with the perception of their peers – in other words they felt that their friends also liked them better in contact lenses.

Another interesting and unexpected finding is that children found contact lenses easier to handle than spectacles. While this may appear counter-intuitive, it is recognised that young children, often because of the physically-active nature of their lives, often break their spectacles. Of course, daily disposable contact lenses do away with many of the handling problems of re-usable lenses – and once a lens is in place in the eye, it is unlikely to get damaged.

Those children who take part in physical activities such as sport or dance and those who may be concerned with their appearance (and isn't that all of them?) would seem to be the most likely to find contact lenses the best method of correcting their vision.

**Notes for editors:**

- The study, *Vision Specific Quality of Life of Pediatric Contact Lens Wearers*, was authored by Marjorie J Rah OD PhD, Jeffrey J Walline OD PhD, Lisa A Jones-Jordan PhD, Loraine T Sinnott PhD, John Mark Jackson OD MS, Ruth E Manny OD PhD, Bradley Coffey OD and Stacy Lyons OD; the Adolescent and Child Health Initiative to Encourage Vision Empowerment (ACHIEVE) Group. The authors were from the New England College of Optometry, Boston Massachusetts; Ohio State University College of Optometry, Columbus, Ohio; Southern College of Optometry, Memphis, Tennessee; University of Houston College of Optometry, Houston, Texas; Pacific University College of Optometry, Forest Grove, Oregon.
- It was published in Optometry and Vision Science, Vol. 87 no. 8, August 2010
- The European Council of Optometry and Optics is the European organisation which represents the interests of optometrists and opticians from 30 countries. It aims to promote eye health to the public across borders and to harmonise clinical and educational standards of optometric and optical practice throughout Europe.

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