

# MY EYES ARE RED...CAN'T BE MY CONTACT LENSES!

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Tami Hagemeyer, A.B.O.C.  
[tamihagemeyer@gmail.com](mailto:tamihagemeyer@gmail.com)

When a patient's complaint is a red, irritated eye, one of the first questions we typically ask is, "Do you wear contact lenses?" We ask this first because if they wear contact lenses, it may provide some necessary clues to the source of the irritation.

C.L.A.R.E, or Contact Lens Acute Red Eye, may be caused by various factors, including, contact lens over wear, sleeping in contact lenses, or poor hygiene.

It is important for all contact lens wearers to understand their decision to wear contact lenses comes with responsibility. A single step of the disinfecting regimen is "skipped" for a day or two, may result in serious eye infections. Poor personal hygiene directly affects our ability to wear contact lenses with comfort. There can be no middle ground.

A compromise may be to fit our patient with daily disposable contact lenses, elevating the need for disinfecting-they will discard the contact lenses at the end of the day, beginning each day with a fresh pair.

The issue that may arise is the thought that we are somehow saving money by wearing contact lenses (designed for a single wear), for longer periods of time.

Over wearing or sleeping in contact lenses can also result in painful red eyes, increased mucus, and light sensitivity.

Corneal ulcers are more common when extended wear contact lenses are worn longer than the manufacturer's, and the doctor's recommendation.

Parasitic: The Acanthamoeba parasite is a living organism that can enter the eye thru tiny abrasions on the cornea. Over-wearing contact lenses can cause tiny tears in the cornea, this parasitic is often contact lens related. This parasite is commonly found in dirt, dust, showers and swimming pools, lakes, rivers, hot springs, hot tubs, and even in our drinking water. It has also been found in air condition systems and in the slime layers in pipes. The acanthamoeba parasite lodges itself between the contact lens and cornea, and proceeds to invade the surface of the cornea. The acanthamoeba parasite *will* cause permanent blindness if not treated immediately.

Giant Papillary Conjunctivitis, or GPC is uncomfortable red bumps on the tarsal plate (found in the upper eye lid). When our patient's have GPC they're eyes feel itchy, and often have a gritty or foreign body sensation. Although GPC has many causes, one of the most common is, over wearing soft contact lenses.

Although not common, some patients may react to chemicals in contact lens disinfecting solutions.

Dry Eye Syndrome is a chronic disease caused by an individual's lack of quality tears that are necessary to maintain the eyes natural lubrication. Medical conditions, diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, thyroid conditions and, blepharitis, are associated as a source of Dry Eye Syndrome. Some patients experience dry eyes as one of the side effects when taking medication for many chronic health conditions. Many times the culprit for dry eye syndrome is lack of sleep.

Dry Eye Syndrome often goes undiagnosed but may be the source of our patients' blurred vision.

Computer Vision Syndrome and digital eyestrain is also linked with Dry Eye Syndrome.

Environmental allergies cause our immune systems to release histamines when they come in contact with a substance the individual is allergic to. Histamines are found in our body's cells, it is a chemical that induces the symptoms we associate with allergies, runny noses, sneezing, and makes the blood vessels in our eyes become enlarged, appearing inflamed and cause tearing.

Bacterial conjunctivitis: The most common source of an eye infection, and often referred to as "Pink Eye." We see it often in schools because it is spread through physical contact. It creates irritation, redness and excessive mucus.

Viral conjunctivitis: A very contagious airborne virus. It is often caused by the Adenovirus; a group of viruses that affect the tissue in our respiratory system, intestines, urinary tract, nervous systems as well as our eyes. Patients suffer with redness, pain, and if not treated may result in vision changes or in rare conditions, blindness.

Episcleritis is a localized inflammation on the episclera. It is uncomfortable, and often accompanied with tearing. Its symptoms will last about 2 weeks and does not usually require medication other than topical lubrication to help with any discomfort. It may, in some instances, require a corticosteroid, to improve our patient's symptoms.

Scleritis: It is rare, and is usually associated with autoimmune diseases. If not treated, it may lead to vision loss. Treatment is usually an anti-inflammatory medication.

Anterior uveitis: A group of inflammatory diseases that cause inflammation of the iris. Patients may experience reduced vision or possible vision loss. Timeline for this disease varies, and may be reoccurring.

Herpetic ocular disease is a viral infection causing red eyes. It is the same virus that is responsible for the common cold sore.

Smoking causes redness and irritation, making us more susceptible to conjunctivitis.

The common cold and flu symptoms can also be combined with red irritated eyes, along with a stuffy nose and sometimes a fever.

During the summer months we see an increase of red irritated eyes caused by swimming pools. The tear film is composed of multiple layers (lipid, aqueous and mucin layer) that perfectly interact with each other not only to keep our eyes lubricated, but also to keep the tear film from evaporating too quickly. Chemicals in pools, like, chlorine and saline, though they are perfect for disinfection, they can cause irritation to the ocular surface. It evaporates some of the protective tear film, leaving the surface of our eyes less protected against bacteria found in many swimming pools.

Chlorine alone is a known eye irritant, and may cause an inflammatory condition called chemical conjunctivitis. Chemical conjunctivitis causes redness, itching, tearing and photophobia.

Daily disposable contact lenses offer many advantages over monthly or bi-weekly contact lenses.

For the occasional contact lens wearer, this person that may elect to wear contact lenses for sports. He or she may wear equipment that hinders spectacle wear; or the contact lens wearer that chooses to wear contact lenses for a special occasion, an occasion that may not be conducive to spectacle wear.

It is important for eye care providers to remember we have an obligation to provide the necessary education to every patient contemplating contact lenses for their vision correction needs. Occasionally we may find it necessary to be honest and realistic about the consequences of non-compliance; and help them understand following contact lens instructions will ultimately be reflected in their ocular health.

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#### Acknowledgements

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