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Contacts and Cosmetics

Contact lens wearers who wear cosmetics on a daily basis may be especially vulnerable to eye problems. Misuse of products and adverse reactions to ingredients used in cosmetic formulas cause lens deposits, eye irritation, allergy, dryness, injury and infection. Knowing which products to use and how to use them is important for long-term, problem-free contact lens wear.

Before handling lenses, wash your hands with a mild soap such as Neutrogena, Ivory or a clear glycerin soap. Or, use one of the specialty soaps for contact lens wearers such as AOSoap or Optisoap. Avoid soaps containing cream, deodorant, antiseptics, or heavy fragrances.

Contact lenses should be inserted before any cosmetics are applied to prevent contaminating the lens by makeup and disrupting makeup by tears. Mascara should be used sparingly and only on the outer half of the lashes. Besides being a potential irritant, mascara is frequently a source of infection. Even with the best of care, mascara and eyeliner should be replaced every three months. Use a light touch with eyeliners and shadows, as they may cause blepharitis, an infection of the eyelid that can lead to styes and chalazion. Don't use eye liner pencils inside the lower eyelid. Color pigments can cause irritation, damage contact lenses, or lodge underneath the contact lens and scratch the cornea.

Prevent contamination of your makeup by keeping it dry and avoiding contact with fingers. Keep applicators clean and replace them after approximately three months. Hair spray, deodorant, cologne, mousse, nail polish and nail polish remover should be used before inserting your lenses. If one of these products gets into your eye it can cause permanent damage to the contact lens surface. If you must use hair spray while wearing contacts, close your eyes tightly while spraying and then leave the area quickly. Aerosol mist lingers in the air for some time after spraying.

Never wear contacts when using hair dyes, permanent wave lotions, or medicated shampoos.

Use cosmetics labeled "hypoallergenic," "for contact lens wearers," or "for sensitive eyes." Approximately one in ten women have either a respiratory or skin allergy to perfume. Hypoallergenic brands are designed to be free of irritants such as perfumes and lanolin. Lanolin may be used in cosmetics and soaps and is one of the most common allergens, causing redness, itching, and blotchy skin spots.

Wash your hands and remove contact lenses before removing make-up. Your fingers are less likely to be contaminated by pigments, creams and oils from cosmetic products when the lenses are removed first.