

Relief from annoying allergy symptoms

Spring and Summer are associated with sunshine and new growth but they are also notorious for allergic reactions such as hay fever because pollen levels are at their highest.

Allergens are substances that cause allergic reactions and include seasonal pollens, dust, animal hair and mould spores. Symptoms vary but they can be similar to those of a common cold.

When allergens enter the eyes, substances including histamines are released, causing allergy symptoms.

Medications in the form of tablets or eye-drops can provide relief from allergies but you should not rely on them. All medications have side effects and may become ineffective with long-term use. Prevention of allergies is a much better option.

Check with your optometrist if you have a medical condition like diabetes or glaucoma, as some hay fever medications may make these worse.

Minimise your contact with allergens. Keep your windows and doors closed during windy days, vacuum your carpet often and keep



pets outdoors. Have a smoke-free house or workplace and avoid rubbing your eyes because this will make them feel worse.

Be careful about going out in the open air during the pollen season, especially in mid-afternoon when the pollen count is highest. Sunglasses can help protect your eyes against pollens.

Y O U R O P T O M E T R I S T

Novelty contact lenses can be **DANGEROUS**

Wearing novelty contact lenses may seem like fun and an exciting way to change the appearance of your eyes but as teenager Tennille Brassington discovered, the thrill of wearing novelty contact lenses can have devastating consequences.

Tennille's vision was damaged by an infection she developed from wearing novelty contact lenses. She became blind in one eye and had to have a corneal transplant to restore her vision.

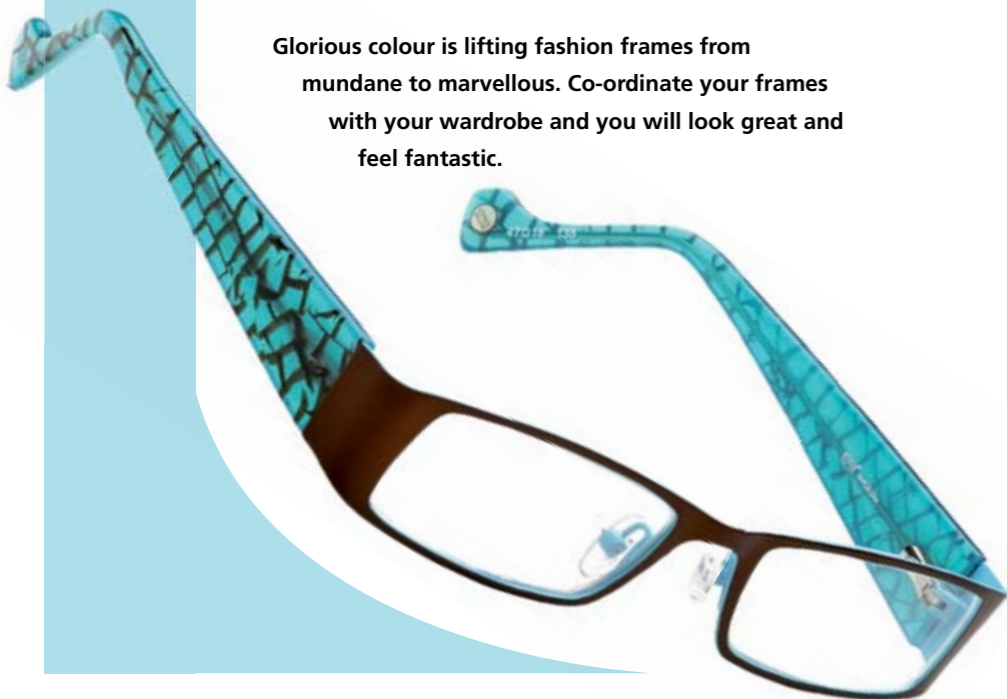
Tennille had borrowed her friend's novelty contact lenses and wore them for just one night and part of the next day. She did not have a solution to clean them; she thought the 'watery stuff' in the lens case was the cleaning solution.

The lenses were purchased from a market retailer who could not give Tennille appropriate care instructions. Novelty contact lenses should never be shared with others or kept in the eye for too long, and suitable cleaning solutions for lenses must always be used. All contact lenses, including novelty lenses, require a strict health care regimen.

Do not to buy novelty lenses from unqualified retailers or the internet. Always have them prescribed by an optometrist, who can give you professional advice and instructions.

FABULOUS FRAMES

Glorious colour is lifting fashion frames from mundane to marvellous. Co-ordinate your frames with your wardrobe and you will look great and feel fantastic.



UV protection helps prevent pterygia

A pterygium is a growth of tissue, often triangular-shaped, that usually starts in one corner of the eye and can grow onto the cornea.

Pterygia can occur in both eyes and although they can look unsightly and cause some discomfort, they are benign lesions and are usually not dangerous.

The exact causes of pterygia are not known but exposure over a long period to ultraviolet rays is a risk factor. Harsh conditions such as heat, dryness, wind, dust and smoke can cause inflammation and irritation of existing pterygia and heredity is thought to play a role in their development.

Pterygia are more often seen in people from tropical climates as experienced in Northern Australia, but are also found in those who spend a great deal of time outdoors.

The best way to reduce your risk of developing a pterygium is to wear sunglasses whenever you are outdoors.

Your optometrist is the best source of advice about purchasing a good pair of sunglasses to protect your eyes against UV radiation.

In many cases protecting your eyes from ultraviolet rays will stabilise a pterygium if it is not actively growing.

In cases where the pterygium grows on to the cornea and distorts vision, the only effective treatment is surgical removal. Fortunately this requires relatively minor surgery, which is usually performed under a local anaesthetic. As pterygia often grow back after surgery, prevention is better than cure.

If you have an area of raised tissue on or around the eyes, you should consult an optometrist to have it diagnosed.

SOOTHING EYE-DROPS

Eye-drops and ointments include a range of medications to treat eye conditions such as allergies, infection, inflammation and disease.

Some eye-drops, such as lubricating and tear-replacement solutions, only alleviate symptoms and are used for conditions such as dry eye.

Optometrists may use eye-drops during an eye examination. These include medications to dilate (enlarge) the pupils so your optometrist can examine the inner eye, and anaesthetics that make the examination comfortable for the patient.

Eye-drops need to be used properly to be effective. It is important to ensure that the medication not only reaches the eye but is also fully absorbed so that the eye receives maximum benefit.

Always wash your hands thoroughly before inserting eye-drops and avoid touching the dropper tip against your eye or anything else. Eye-drops and droppers must be kept clean.

While tilting your head back, pull down the lower lid of your eye with your index finger to form a pocket. Hold the dropper with the other hand as close to the eye as possible without touching it. Gently squeeze the dropper so the drop falls into

the pocket made by the lower eyelid.

Close your eye for two or three minutes. Wipe any excess liquid from your face with a tissue and replace and tighten the cap immediately. If more than one drop is required, wait five minutes between inserting the drops.



CONTACT LENSES

Julie aces opponents



When active sports and the need for spectacles are a challenging combination, contact lenses may be the answer.

Julie has myopia. For her, close objects are clear but distant objects appear blurred. She also plays competitive tennis. Julie finds that wearing spectacles while playing tennis is not only annoying, it hampers her game.

'If I wear my spectacles when I play, I can't play at my best because they fog up and move around, but if I don't wear them, I am also not performing at my best. This is frustrating,' Julie says.

Her optometrist suggested she could try soft contact lenses and scheduled a trial lens fitting just before tennis practice one afternoon. For Julie, the result was magic.

'Playing tennis while wearing contact lenses is just so much better. I have more confidence and there has been such an improvement in my game.'

Her tennis coach says she has been hitting more balls off the middle of the racquet since she started wearing contact lenses.

'My coach says I am better at seeing the ball off my opponent's racquet and better prepared when the ball arrives.

'At first I wore my contact lenses just when I practised or played matches but then I began wearing them to school and they are great,' Julie says.

Julie now has extended-wear soft contact lenses that can stay on her eyes for 14 days.

For an active teenager always on the go, convenience and lifestyle are a perfect fit.

Glaucoma steals sight from the unwary

Glaucoma affects more than 300,000 Australians. It is a disease in which the optic nerve at the back of the eye is slowly destroyed. This prevents visual information getting from the eye to the brain. In most people this damage is associated with a higher than average pressure inside the eye. The condition can lead to blindness if left untreated.

Glaucoma usually progresses slowly, gradually destroying the edges of your visual field. The disease can go undetected because 90 per cent of our attention is devoted to our central vision. A person with glaucoma tends not to notice anything until the growing blind spots in each eye overlap each other. This damage is irreversible and eventually causes blindness.

Treatment can only slow the deterioration, not prevent it, so it is important to detect the problem and start treatment

as early as possible. If glaucoma is identified early and treated appropriately, good eyesight can usually be maintained.

Those with a family history of glaucoma are at higher risk of developing the disease. Diabetes or an eye injury can also increase risk and, while glaucoma is associated with the elderly, younger people can also develop the condition.

Frequent routine eye examinations are the best way to detect glaucoma. They play a crucial role in preventing blindness and give the best chance of managing the condition.

Optometrists can detect glaucoma by looking at the structure of your eyes, measuring the pressure inside your eyes and testing your peripheral vision.

People over 40 years and those with a family history of glaucoma should have a regular eye examination at least every two years.



Normal vision



Simulated effect of glaucoma

TEARS FOR A HEALTHY EYE

Tears are important for our eyes as they help to protect, lubricate and clean them.

When tears do not function properly they can cause dry eyes or—strange as it seems—watery eyes.

Tears are a combination of water for moisture, oils for lubrication, mucus for even spreading and proteins for resistance to infection. When there is an imbalance in tear composition, dry eyes may be experienced.

People with dry eyes may complain of their eyes being very watery because an irritated eye stimulates tear production, but these tears are ineffective.

Tears keep the front of the eye (the cornea) moist and comfortable, which helps maintain clear vision. Tears

wash away debris and waste products and help clear away dust. They also provide nutrients to the eye to keep it healthy.

Factors that contribute to dry eye symptoms include being exposed to hot, dry, windy climates as well as poor air quality from pollution or cigarette smoke. Heaters, air conditioning and aeroplane travel may increase the evaporation of tears from the surface of the eye.

We tend to blink less when concentrating on a computer screen or watching television, which can lead to our eyes becoming dry.

It is common for contact lens wearers to experience dry eye because contact lens materials tend to absorb tears,

creating dry spots on the lens surface.

Dry eye is very common among the elderly as tear glands become less effective with age.

Some diseases and medications can cause symptoms of dryness too. Pregnancy, the contraceptive pill and menopause all cause hormonal changes and may result in changes in tear film stability and tear production.

Taking regular breaks from the computer, blinking often and avoiding environmental conditions that cause dry eye symptoms may help to prevent the condition.

If you are experiencing dry eye symptoms, an eye examination will determine the underlying cause of the problem.