

Should Children Wear Contact Lenses?

By **Deborah Dera**

Most parents, upon finding that their children have vision problems, want to know whether or not their children should wear contact lenses. The question they usually ask is whether or not their kids are old enough to wear contact lenses. The truth, however, is that age has nothing to do with it. Maturity, on the other hand, does.

Wearing Contact Lenses at a Young Age

While most of us didn't get our first pair of contact lenses until we hit our teenage years, others are able to start at a much earlier age. Babies born with certain eye conditions, for example, can sometimes be fitted for contact lenses only days after birth. The babies become used to having contacts in their eyes and have no problems adjusting to them as they grow older.

Children as young as ages 8 through 11 have been known to wear contact lenses as well. Some may be fit for one-day disposable lenses instead of two-week or washable lenses. These shorter-term lenses are perfect for children who do not yet have a firm grasp on the hygienic responsibilities associated with contact lens wear.

The Benefits of Contact Lenses for Children

Contact lenses, because of the way they sit over the eye, offer better peripheral vision. Peripheral vision, or the distance you can see around you without turning your head, is especially important if your child is involved in contact sports. They'll also reduce problems associated with fogging, perspiration streaks, and simply having the glasses fly off the face during play.

Another benefit of contact lenses lies in your child's self esteem. Wearing contact lenses can help in a number of ways. Some children may simply feel a bit older and adjust their attitudes and lifestyles according to the way they perceive they look. Others, sadly, are simply self-conscious about having to wear glasses and become unbearable to deal with when it comes to matters of appearance. Either way, children who wear contact lenses are more likely to feel better about themselves and, in turn, may become more active in social activities.

Backup Glasses for Contact Lens Wearers

It's important for you, as a parent, to realize that contact lenses are not a suitable replacement for glasses 100% of the time. Even if your child wears contacts he or she will need to have a backup pair of glasses available at the same, current prescription. You'll need to make sure your child removes his glasses at least an hour each day to allow the eyes ample time to breathe and there will be days when your child doesn't want to or cannot wear contacts.

Does Your Child Want Contacts?

The most important deciding factor, of course, is whether or not your child *wants* to wear contacts. In the end, the decision is not up to you. If your child is ready for contacts and really wants them he'll let you know. If he's not showing interest, don't force him to wear them. Some kids simply aren't ready despite our willingness to let them try.

If your child is mature enough to handle the responsibility, and really wants contacts, make sure you bring up the subject with your eye care provider at your child's next appointment. He or she will be able to work with you and your child to determine the next course of action.