

# LOOKING AFTER SOFT CONTACT LENSES

Contact lenses are becoming an increasingly popular way of correcting either short-sightedness, long-sightedness or astigmatism instead of using glasses. While the risks of wearing contact lenses are low, this is only true if they are looked after in the way that the manufacturers recommend.

## **What are the main problems with contact lenses?**

Infection is the main complication that contact lens wearers are prone to. This is because either a soft lens or gas permeable lens produces micro scratches on the surface of the cornea, which is the window of the eye, and if there are any organisms on the contact lens these may result in an infection, thus the most important care of the lenses is to ensure that they are regularly sterilised once a day and clean.



## **Care of soft lenses.**

These differ from the older gas permeable type lenses in that they are more prone to infections and need to be sterilised each night. They should never be worn on an extended wear basis whereby the lenses are left in the night over night for several days. There are many different solutions for sterilising the soft lenses. The medical recommendation which was highlighted on the "Watch Dog" programme is to use a two-step system involving hydrogen peroxide. This is believed to be an effective sterilising solution. The lenses are first cleaned with a surfactant cleaner and then placed in the hydrogen which it is recommended to do overnight, and then the neutralising solution added to the solution in the morning before being placed in the eye. Again the contact lens case should be changed once every 3 months. In addition you should always inspect the lens before replacing it in the eye and any splits, cracks or deposits on the surface should necessitate the lens being discarded and changed.

Other forms of sterilising, such as boiling the lens, is no longer popular.

Should your eye become red or painful, the lens should be removed and if this does not immediately settle in an hour or so, you should consult your Optometrist or Ophthalmic Medical Practitioner that day or failing this attend an Eye Casualty. It is important never to go to bed with a painful, red eye as ocular infections are far easier to treat in the early stage rather than later. Should you attend either your General Practitioner or Casualty, it is important to ensure that if you are given any antibiotic drops or ointment for the eye, that these are not the normal common Chloramphenicol which is given out for most conditions but one that is designed for the type of organisms that can cause problems with contact lenses and normally Ofloxacin, Gentamicin or Tobramycin are more appropriate.

With diligent care and scrupulous sterilisation techniques, you should have many years of successful contact lens wear.

**It is vitally important that you have an annual check up with your Contact Lens Practitioner once a year to check the quality of the lenses and to ensure that your eye is not reacting in an adverse way to the contact lenses.**