

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
APRIL 2011

For More Information, Contact:
David Bobka, WOA Communications Director
Email: davidwoaoffice@tds.net
Phone: 608.824.2200

Step into Spring: Keeping an 'Eye' on Seasonal Allergies

Common medications and remedies don't cut it for easing eye allergies

Madison, Wis. - For most Americans, the start of spring is welcomed by thoughts of warmer weather, beautiful flowers and picnics in the park. However, for the 50 million Americans who suffer from allergies, the early signs of spring more closely resemble sneezing, coughing, and itchy, watery eyes.

According to the Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA), eye allergies, also called "allergic conjunctivitis," are a reaction to indoor and outdoor allergens – pollen, mold, dust mites and pet dander – that get in the eyes and cause inflammation of the tissue which lines the inner eyelid.

While eye allergies can affect anyone, spring can be particularly hard on contact lens wearers. Extended wear time and infrequent lens replacement are two of the main reasons contact lens wearers face more prevalent symptoms. Dr. Lisa Slaby, Green Bay-area optometrist and current WOA President, recommends that contact lens wearers consider the following to make the spring season more comfortable:

- Reduce contact lens wearing time when possible.
- Talk to your optometrist about changing your cleaning method or using daily disposable contact lenses.
- Use eye drops as prescribed by your eye doctor.

When it comes to treating symptoms of allergies, the American Eye-Q®, a recent nationwide survey conducted by the American Optometric Association (AOA), found that more than one-third (36 percent) of allergy sufferers use antihistamines or other medications to treat their symptoms. While antihistamines can help with typical symptoms like runny noses and sneezing, the medication can make ocular symptoms worse by reducing tear quality and quantity.

"To effectively treat and relieve the symptoms caused by eye allergies, patients should see their optometrist," said Dr. Slaby. "In most cases, we can soothe allergy-related conjunctivitis with prescriptions or over-the-counter eye drops depending on the patient and his or her medical history."

While eye allergies can be a nuisance and affect job performance as well as leisure and sporting activities, symptoms of allergies can be curtailed and prevented by following these recommendations from the WOA and AOA:

- Don't touch or rub your eyes.
- Wash hands often with soap and water.
- Wash bed linens and pillowcases in hot water and detergent to reduce allergens.
- Avoid sharing, and in some cases, wearing, eye makeup.
- Never share contact lenses or contact lens cases with someone else.

In addition to discussing allergy relief options with your optometrist, the WOA also recommends patients discuss the frequency of comprehensive eye exams. Based on an individual's eye health and the severity of his or her eye allergies, the eye doctor may recommend more frequent visits.

To find an optometrist in your area, or for additional information on how best to cope with seasonal allergies, please visit www.woa-eyes.org or www.aoa.org.

About the Wisconsin Optometric Association

The Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA) is a nonprofit affiliation of licensed doctors of optometry and associated businesses dedicated to the preservation and enhancement of the vision welfare of the people of Wisconsin. The WOA accomplishes its goals through: education and dissemination of information, organized governmental activity, legislation and regulation, mediation with consumer and public interest groups, and provision of collective benefits to its members. Approximately 650 doctors of optometry are currently members of the WOA located in nearly every county in the state. All members must be licensed to practice optometry by the State of Wisconsin. For more information, visit WOA's Web site at www.woa-eyes.org.