

KEEPING AN EYE ON SEASONAL ALLERGIES

See your optometrist for proper treatment of allergic conjunctivitis

MADISON, WI - For most Americans, the start of spring is welcomed by thoughts of warmer weather, beautiful flowers and picnics in the park. However, for the millions of 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 \(WOA\)](#), many people suffer from "allergic conjunctivitis," which is the inflammation of the tissue lining the eyelids (conjunctiva) due to a reaction from allergy-causing substances such as pollen, mold, dust mites and pet dander. The [American Optometric Association's \(AOA\)](#) Sixth Annual American Eye-Q® survey found that the most commonly reported symptoms associated with seasonal allergies are itchy eyes, watery eyes, dry eye, and red or irritated eyes.

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 during this season. Dr. Jeff Sarazen, Wausau 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.

While antihistamines can help with typical allergy symptoms such as runny noses and sneezing, the medication could make ocular symptoms worse. Therefore, according to Dr. Sarazen, "To effectively treat and relieve the symptoms caused by eye allergies, patients should see their eye doctor. 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."

When it comes to identifying generational differences in those affected by eye allergies, the American Eye-Q® survey also found that more young Americans rather than older generations are suffering from seasonal eye allergies, with 45% of Generation X and 39% of Generation Y having reported suffering from this condition. This is opposed to 35% of baby boomers and 30% of the Greatest Generation reporting such issues.

While eye allergies can be a nuisance, affecting job performance as well as leisure and sporting activities, symptoms of these 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.

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 website at www.woa-eyes.org.