

SEASONAL EYE ALLERGIES CAN MAKE FOR AN ITCHY SPRING SEASON

Members of the Wisconsin Optometric Association recommend seeing your eye doctor to treat allergic conjunctivitis

MADISON, WI - The beginning of spring is often welcomed by thoughts of warmer weather, blooming flowers, and an escape from the Wisconsin winter cold. However, for the millions of Americans who suffer from seasonal eye allergies, the early signs of springtime can be sneezing, coughing, and experiencing itchy, watery eyes. The good news for those suffering with the discomfort associated with seasonal eye allergies is that a simple visit to your eye doctor can help soothe the symptoms.

Many people suffer from “allergic conjunctivitis” during the spring season, 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) Ninth Annual American Eye-Q® survey found that almost 40% of Americans suffer from seasonal eye allergies. The most commonly reported symptoms associated with seasonal allergies are itchy, watery eyes, red or irritated eyes, and dry eyes.

While antihistamines can help with typical allergy symptoms such as runny noses and sneezing, such medications can actually make ocular symptoms worse. Therefore, how can those who suffer from seasonal eye allergies get relief? According to 2015 WOA President and Sturgeon Bay optometrist Dr. Eric Paulsen, “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.”

Although seasonal eye allergies can affect anyone, spring can be particularly hard on contact lens wearers. Extended wear time is a main reason why contact lens wearers face more prevalent symptoms during this season. In fact, over half of all contact lens wearers frequently wear disposable contact lenses for longer than the suggested duration, as reported in the American Eye-Q® survey. Dr. Paulsen recommends that contact lens wearers consider the following, in order to make the spring season more comfortable:

- Reduce contact lens wearing time, whenever possible.
- Replace your contact lens case every 1-3 months.
- Wash your hands with soap and water before handling lenses.
- Clean contact lenses with multi-purpose solution on a daily basis.
- Soak your lenses in sufficient multi-purpose solution overnight.
- Store lenses in a lens storage case.
- Clean the case after each use, keeping it open and dry between cleanings.

While seasonal eye allergies can be a nuisance, symptoms can be both curtailed and prevented by avoiding touching or rubbing your eyes, washing bed linens and pillowcases in hot water and detergent to reduce allergens, avoiding the sharing of (and in some cases, the wearing of) eye makeup, and by never sharing either contact lenses or contact lens cases with another person.

To find an optometrist in your area to help treat your seasonal eye allergies, please visit <http://woa-eyes.org/members>.

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 630 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.

About the survey

The ninth annual American Eye-Q® survey was created and commissioned in conjunction with Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates (PSB). From March 20-25, 2014, PSB conducted 1,000 online interviews among Americans 18 years and older who embodied a nationally representative sample of the U.S. general population (margin of error is plus or minus 3.10 percentage points at a 95% confidence level.)