

# decorative contact lenses: what teens and parents need to know



You may want to look like your favorite movie star or singer or have the perfect look for Halloween, but changing the look of your eyes with decorative contact lenses could cause a lot of damage to your eyesight.

Read more from the American Academy of Pediatrics about how to protect your eyes from harm.

## What are decorative contact lenses?

Decorative contact lenses are considered medical devices. The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) oversees their safety and effectiveness, just like regular contact lenses. Though they only change the look of your eyes and do not correct your vision, an exam, a prescription, and proper lens care are important.

Decorative contact lenses are sometimes called

- Fashion contact lenses
- Halloween contact lenses
- Color contact lenses
- Cosmetic contact lenses
- Theatrical contact lenses

## How can decorative contact lenses harm my eyes?

Wearing decorative contact lenses can be risky, just like the contact lenses that correct your vision.

The risks of not using contact lenses correctly include

- A cut or scratch on the top layer of your eyeball (corneal abrasion)
- Allergic reactions like itchy, watery red eyes
- Decreased vision
- Infection
- Blindness

Also, if you are wearing any contact lenses you got without a prescription, even if they feel fine, they still could be causing damage to your eyes.

## What you need to know before putting on decorative contact lenses

If you plan on wearing decorative contact lenses, even if only for a special event, you need to make sure that you

1. **Get an eye exam.** The fit of your contact lenses is very important. A wrong fit can cause damage to your eyes. Be sure to always go for follow-up eye exams.

2. **Get a prescription.** Your eye doctor will write you a prescription for all contact lenses, including decorative lenses. The prescription should include the brand name, correct lens measurements, and expiration date.

3. **Know how to care for your contact lenses.** Follow the instructions for wearing, cleaning, and disinfecting that come with your contact lenses. If you do not receive instructions, ask your eye doctor for them.

4. **Only buy contact lenses from a company that sells FDA-cleared or approved contact lenses and requires you to provide a prescription.** Anyone selling you contact lenses must get your prescription and verify it with your doctor. They should request not only the prescription but the name of your doctor and a phone number. If they don't ask for this information, they are breaking federal law and could be selling you illegal contact lenses.

5. **Call your eye doctor right away and remove your contact lenses if your eyes are red or have ongoing pain or discharge!** Redness of, pain in, and discharge from the eyes are signs of an eye infection. If you think you have an eye infection from your contact lenses, remove them and see a licensed eye doctor (optometrist or ophthalmologist) right away! An eye infection could become serious and cause you to become blind if it is not treated.

## Remember—buying contact lenses without a prescription is dangerous!

There are a lot of products that you can buy without a prescription, but they may not be safe or legal. Never buy contact lenses from a street vendor, beauty supply store, flea market, novelty store, or Halloween store. Also, never share contacts with anyone else.

Protect your eyes by having an eye exam, getting a prescription, and buying contact lenses from a legal source.

Source: US Food and Drug Administration. Decorative contact lenses. <http://www.fda.gov/MedicalDevices/ProductsandMedicalProcedures/HomeHealthandConsumer/ConsumerProducts/ContactLenses/ucm270953.htm>. Updated October 10, 2012. Accessed August 5, 2013.

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