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How to avoid irritated, dried-out eyes while wearing contact lenses in cold weather



By Ashley Williams, AccuWeather staff writer

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During the colder months, contact lens wearers might notice more eye discomfort than usual. The chilly, dry air can also zap moisture from the eyes, making contact lenses more likely to irritate a person's vision.

These colder conditions lead to low humidity in the air, according to **ophthalmologist** Dr. Ming Wang of the Nashville-based Wang Vision 3D Cataract and LASIK Center.

"As a result, contact lens wearers may 'notice' their eyes more," Wang said. "Low humidity leads to drying of the **tear film layer**, and since contact lenses are kept moist on the eye from the tear film, this could result in blurred vision and the feeling of a foreign body sensation."

Understanding the unique challenges contact lens wearers face during the colder fall and winter months begins with a person's general health, according to Dr. Michael Chernich, senior director of eye care **for Pearle Vision**.

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"People tend to drink less water [when it's cold], leading to dehydration," Chernich said. "Less water in the body means fewer tears in your eyes, which can cause dryness and discomfort."

When the weather outside is chilly, people are more likely to be exposed to artificial heat indoors. Oftentimes, these heating units dry out the air, according to Chernich.

"Less water in the air means less water on the surface of the contact lens, which can lead to discomfort and redness," Chernich said, adding that certain contact lenses perform better than others in these conditions.

Experts recommend distancing oneself from radiators while indoors so that the eyes won't dry out as much.

When it comes to the weather's impact on contact lenses, the cold isn't as much of an issue as are the blustery conditions that occur, as wind dries out the surface of contact lenses, Chernich said.

"This causes friction between the contact lens and lids when you blink, making it feel less comfortable and leading to redness," he said.

Blurred vision can also happen for contact lens wearers over a period of time while in cold weather conditions, according to Dr. Nancy Kwon, contact lens specialist for New York-based Stony Brook University's ophthalmology department.

"[This occurs when] the weather is so cold that it dries out their lenses," Kwon said.

One issue lens wearers will unlikely ever have to worry about is the lenses freezing while on their eyes, according to Kwon.

"Even if it's as cold as minus 60 degrees Fahrenheit, studies in the 1980s have shown that this is a myth," she said.

Chernich added that our normal body temperature helps prevent this from happening. "The temperature of the cornea and tears is about 95 F, which means the lens is warm enough even when it's in the teens outside, as the tear film constantly warms the lens above freezing temperature," he said.

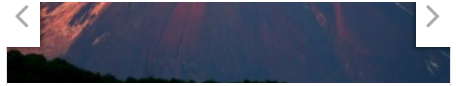
Since the 1980s, materials for creating contact lenses have improved significantly.

"The materials are made with a lot of moisture embedded in the contact through technology," Kwon said. "The only thing you can experience is dryness, which is just a little bit of discomfort."

Tips for reducing contact lens discomfort in cold weather

The first step in minimizing any irritation triggered by cold, dry conditions is a comprehensive eye exam with an optometrist, according to Chernich.

In addition to checking your vision, an eye doctor will perform a custom evaluation of the eye and tear film to find the contact lenses that best match an



In 1916, a volcanic eruption blocked the sun causing Canada and USA to experience the summer with extremely cold temperatures.

individual's needs.

"The right contact lenses can help reduce the challenges [cold weather] presents to wearers," Chernich said.

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Contact lens re-wetting drops can lessen symptoms. There are artificial tears that are designed for use with contact lenses or during lens insertion and removal, according to experts.

Drinking plenty of fluids and remaining adequately hydrated is also key for comfortable lens wear.

Dr. Kwon recommended using a humidifier if in an especially dry environment.

Sunglasses are beneficial, as well. "They not only provide protection from harmful UV rays but [also] provide a layer of protection from wind," Chernich said.

Forgoing contact lenses altogether and switching to eyeglasses during colder conditions is also an expert-recommended solution.

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