

Transcript Details

This is a transcript of an educational program. Details about the program and additional media formats for the program are accessible by visiting: <https://reachmd.com/programs/eye-on-ocular-health/rethinking-contact-lenses-for-myopic-kids-why-age-7-isnt-too-young/36282/>

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Rethinking Contact Lenses for Myopic Kids: Why Age 7 Isn't Too Young

Announcer:

You're listening to *Eye on Ocular Health* on ReachMD. On this episode, Dr. Jeffrey Walline joins us to debunk the common myth that pediatric patients with myopia are too young to wear contact lenses. Dr. Walline is the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs at The Ohio State University College of Optometry. Let's hear from him now.

Dr. Walline:

I think the perception that kids are too young to wear contact lenses when they first become myopic comes from both the parents and the doctors. And I think initially, the idea was because the contact lenses didn't provide as much oxygen and they weren't as good as the materials we have today, and so doctors thought that kids with younger eyes may not have as healthy of eyes in the long term if they started wearing contact lenses at younger ages. But we now know that the materials have improved; the modalities have improved. We now have daily disposable contact lenses, so we don't even need to clean them, and we know that kids can start wearing contact lenses at earlier ages. And as for the parents, I think it was because the doctors told them when they were kids that "when you become 13, 14 years old, you can start wearing contact lenses" that they also believe that their children couldn't wear contact lenses. But now with the advances, we can routinely fit kids as young as 7, 8 years old with contact lenses, and they can basically participate in independent care of the contact lenses, not even requiring any help from their parents.

Kids also have very healthy tear films, which makes it easier for them to wear contact lenses; there's less discomfort, so young kids are really, I think, excellent contact lens wearers. And then even younger kids can wear contact lenses, and this is when I think that if they are nearsighted at ages younger than 7 or 8 years old, it sort of becomes medically necessary. And if that's the case, then I'm okay with the parents putting in and taking out contact lenses. But if it's just an elective contact lens, your typical nearsighted child, then I want the children to take care of the contact lenses. They have to be able to put them in and take them out themselves, but they've shown that they're very capable of that at ages as young as 7 or 8 years.

One of the reasons that we want to fit kids with contact lenses is we want to slow the progression of their myopia, which ultimately will, hopefully, lead to better outcomes as an adult. Now, that's hard to talk to parents about and especially hard to talk to kids about because that's something that happens when we're 50 to 60-year-old adults and we don't really think that far into the future. But one of the other things it does is it hopefully helps keep you as a lower myope as an adult when you turn 21 years of age, which makes you a better candidate for refractive surgery. It gives you more options to be able to use for glasses or for contact lenses, and in general, it just makes your eyes healthier, so I think there are lots of reasons. And then one interesting benefit for children is if we fit children with contact lenses compared to fitting them with glasses, their self-esteem improves in the areas of they feel like they are smarter, they feel like their friends like them better, and they feel more athletic. These are big things in children's lives, and it really, in general, helps boost their self-esteem in these specific areas, and we've got the evidence to show that.

Announcer:

That was Dr. Jeffrey Walline talking about how we can address the common misconception that pediatric patients with myopia are too young to wear contacts. To access this and other episodes in our series, visit *Eye on Ocular Health* on ReachMD.com, where you can Be Part of the Knowledge. Thanks for listening!