

# ASK AHSC

## ANSWERS TO HEALTH QUESTIONS

From the University of Arizona Health Sciences Center (AHSC) in Tucson

**Q** I was thinking of getting some weird contact lenses to wear for Halloween but was wondering how safe it is to wear them?

**A** While they may seem like a fun idea for a Halloween costume, cosmetic contact lenses — that come in a variety of patterns and colors — can cause a lot of eye problems, especially if you buy them without a prescription.

While it is unlawful to sell contact lenses to anyone without a recent prescription from an eye doctor, there has been some concern lately with people buying



unauthorized lenses on the black market, at the beach, at flea markets and on the Internet. There has been a rising incidence of eye injuries or infections among wearers.

“Over-the-counter” lenses can lead to serious eye problems, including decreased oxygen flow to the cornea, bacterial infections, swelling, eye pain, sensitivity to light, conjunctivitis (pink eye), corneal scratches, corneal ulceration and loss of clarity. Without treatment, permanent eye damage and loss of sight can result.

According to Prevent Blind-

ness America, statistics show that in 2001, U.S. hospital emergency rooms treated an estimated 1,500 injuries related to contact lenses. That figure doesn't include people treated in doctor's offices, clinics, or not at all. How many of these injuries were caused by cosmetic contact lenses isn't known, but precautions must be taken with any kind of contact lenses:

- Never buy contact lenses without a prescription. Always be fitted for contact lenses by a licensed eye care professional and wear them under an eye care professional's supervision.
- Clean and disinfect contact lenses according to instructions and store them properly in a clean storage case.
- When wearing makeup, use water-soluble cosmetics or those labeled safe for use with contact lenses. Don't apply skin creams or moisturizers too close to the eyes.
- Never sleep while wearing cosmetic contact lenses unless they are approved for this.
- Never wear opaque lenses if you have any problems with night vision.
- Never share or trade your contact lenses with friends.
- Seek immediate medical attention if you experience

any pain, irritation, redness, blurriness or visual changes.  
—Robert W. Snyder, MD, PhD,  
head, Department of  
Ophthalmology, UA College of  
Medicine, Tucson

**Q** What is post-traumatic stress disorder?

**A** Post-traumatic stress disorder (or PTSD) is a condition in which an individual responds to a traumatic event with symptoms such as intense fear, difficulty sleeping, being exceedingly wary and spending a great deal of time re-experiencing the event (nightmares or “flashbacks”).

Anniversaries of traumatic events — such as Sept. 11 — may precipitate a variety of emotional responses in individuals.

For some, such an anniversary may trigger or exacerbate disorders such as PTSD.

Others may experience depression — characterized by sadness or decreased ability to enjoy one's self for at least two weeks; changes in appetite or sleep, poor concentration, interest and energy, guilt and even suicidal thoughts or plans.

For many, feelings of grief and anxiety may be normal and appropriate.

Treatment is indicated if symptoms are interfering with occupational, social or other roles, or are causing substantial distress.

Help is available; for more information on the UA Department of Psychiatry's ongoing research projects and treatment options for PTSD and depression, call (520) 626-5327 or (520) 626-6509.

—Francisco Moreno, MD,  
research assistant professor,  
Department of Psychiatry, UA  
College of Medicine, Tucson