

Step Into Spring: Keeping An “Eye” On Seasonal Allergies

(NAPSA)—For most Americans, the start of spring is welcomed by thoughts of warmer weather, beautiful flowers and picnics in the park. But for the 50 million Americans who suffer from allergies, the early signs of spring more closely resemble sneezing, coughing and itchy, watery eyes.

Eye allergies, also called “allergic conjunctivitis,” are a reaction to indoor and outdoor allergens—pollen, mold, dust mites and pet dander—that get in the eyes and cause inflammation of the tissue that lines the inner eyelid.

While eye allergies can affect anyone, the spring can be particularly hard on contact lens wearers. Extended wear time and infrequent lens replacement are two of the main reasons contact lens wearers face more severe symptoms. Optometrist Barbara Horn, O.D., recommends contact lens wearers consider the following to make the spring season more comfortable:

- Reduce contact lens wearing time when possible.
- Talk to your optometrist about changing your cleaning method or using daily disposable contact lenses.
- Use eyedrops as prescribed by a doctor of optometry.

When it comes to treating symptoms of allergies, the American Eye-Q®, a recent nationwide survey conducted by the American Optometric Association (AOA), found more than one-third (36 percent) of allergy sufferers use antihistamines or other medications to treat their symptoms. While antihistamines can help with typical symptoms such as runny noses and sneezing, the medication can make ocular symptoms worse by reducing tear quality and quantity.

“To effectively treat and relieve the symptoms caused by eye allergies, patients should see their optometrist,” said Dr. Horn. “In



most cases, we can soothe allergy-related conjunctivitis with prescription or over-the-counter eye drops depending on the patient and his or her medical history.”

While eye allergies can be a nuisance and affect job performance and leisure and sporting activities, symptoms of allergies can be curtailed and prevented by following these recommendations from the AOA:

- Don't touch or rub your eyes.
- Wash hands often with soap and water.
- Wash bed linens and pillowcases in hot water and detergent to reduce allergens.
- Avoid sharing—and, in some cases, wearing—eye makeup.
- Never share contact lenses or contact lens cases with someone else.

Beyond discussing allergy relief with your optometrist, the AOA also recommends adults age 60 and under have a comprehensive eye exam every two years. Adults over age 60 should have eye exams annually. Based on an individual's eye health and the severity of his or her eye allergies, the eye doctor may recommend more-frequent visits.

To find an optometrist in the area or for additional information on how best to cope with seasonal allergies, visit www.AOA.org.