Halloween Costume Contact Lenses: They're No Treat for Your Eyes

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It’s no scare tactic: wearing non-prescription contacts can lead to permanent vision loss.

Wearing fashion contact lenses to enhance your Halloween costume’s fear factor may seem like a fun idea. But these non-prescription lenses can cause something far more terrifying — blindness.

Contact lenses are not one size fits all.

They need to be fitted by an ophthalmic professional to the specific dimensions of your eye to avoid stress on the cornea surface and proper oxygenation of the cornea “if it’s not well fitted, micro-abrasions on the cornea can open the door to aggressive bacteria, fungi, or parasites,” says Guillermo Amescua, M.D., an ophthalmologist at Bascom Palmer Eye Institute.
Halloween costume contact lenses are scary — for all the wrong reasons

Several varieties of over-the-counter decorative lenses can cause abrasions on the cornea, which could potentially become infected. In addition, a 2015 study, conducted by Wolters Kluwer, found that many contain chemicals that could induce toxic changes to the corneal surface and debilitate the corneal surface epithelium, the most important barrier against infections. The chemicals may come from colorants used to tint and create playful patterns on the lenses. Chlorine was found in three types of non-prescription costume contact lenses, and iron was found on four pairs of lenses.

While it is illegal to sell non-prescription contact lenses, Halloween costume contact lenses can still be easily purchased at many places such as costume shops, beauty supply stores, and online. During the Halloween season, these lenses are often falsely advertised as “no prescription necessary.”

“Wearing contact lenses without a doctor’s prescription and proper training on application process, removal, and cleaning techniques greatly increases the possibility of serious complications,” says Dr. Amescua. The complications can lead to severe problems such as corneal infections, corneal perforation, infections inside the eye and potentially permanent vision loss.

Additional risks include conjunctivitis (pink eye), swelling of the cornea (corneal edema), sensitivity to light and allergic reactions. In summary, If contacts are not professionally fitted to your eye, they can scratch the superficial corneal layer, causing what is called a corneal abrasion. Whether from a corneal scratch or infection, wearing non-prescription contacts can lead to decreased vision.
Bascom Palmer launches rapid virtual eye care

“What we’ve learned through this very challenging past year is that we are well-equipped to offer the same excellent eye care virtually as we do in the office,” said Eduardo C. Alfonso, M.D., director of Bascom Palmer. “This will make it easier for patients to receive care from the convenience of their own home." Read more.