

## CORRECT BLINKING

While blinking is defined and thought of as an involuntary act, the type and frequency of blinking varies from one person to the next and poor blinking habits are often acquired. Investigation reveals that almost all infants are excellent blinkers; investigation also reveals that nearly everyone with a visual problem develops an incorrect blink. Even as poor blinking may have been acquired; it is possible to achieve correct blinking habits through the use of special exercises. It is imperative that all contact lens wearers develop good blinking habits, for correct blinking frequently makes the differences between success and failure with contact lenses.

Although special and improved contact lens designs, which facilitate correct blinking, are used routinely, total success with contact lenses can only be achieved by a strong personal desire and an enlightened effort to practice blinking exercises.

## EFFECTS OF BLINKING ON THE EYE

The important function of blinking is the spreading of the tear film across the cornea and the maintenance of a natural moist condition, which protects the eye from the irritation effects of dryness. During a blink the upper lid moves downward to contact the lower lid: the lower lid does not move up. If the upper lid does not move down enough to contact the lower lid, a portion of the cornea will remain exposed and will not be moistened by tears. As a result of this "partial" blinking, the exposed area of the cornea will dry and will cause itchiness, scratchiness, redness, burning, and /or a tired, heavy feeling. Drying of the eyes often becomes an important problem for contact lens wearers. That portion of the cornea covered by the contact lens is obviously protected from drying, but the area of the cornea surrounding the lens tends to dry very quickly, especially if blinking is not perfect. Although drying may sometimes make contact lenses difficult to wear from the beginning, the irritating effects of dryness do not usually develop until often months or even years of successful wearing. If the irritation becomes severe it may even require the discontinuing of contact lens wear.

## HOW TO BLINK PROPERLY

There are two sets of muscles in the eyelids, which we will call the “heavy” and “light” muscles. The purpose of the heavy muscles is to close the eyelids quickly in the event of an emergency. If through faulty habits the heavy muscles are used for “squinting” or for partial blinking these undesirable habits must be eliminated in order for contact lenses to be worn with maximum success. The tension created by the heavy muscles can be felt with the fingers by placing your two index fingers at the extreme outer corners of your eyes, at the angle of your lids. When positioning your index fingers, gently move them so that they rest on the heavy muscles in order that the maximum tension created when a “forced blink” is made will be felt. While monitoring you blinking in this manner, you probably will at first feel muscle tension or pulling during blinking actions, since most people do not have the most desirable blinking habits for contact lens wear. However, a strong personal desire to improve blinking by practicing blinking exercises can eliminate tension through relaxation of heavy muscles, while learning to use the light muscles correctly. This usually requires a two to eight week period of intensive practice. After this time, a reduced maintenance program can be followed.

### STEPS FOR CORRECT BLINKING EXERCISE

1. **Relax.** It is very important not to force any eye movement throughout the entire exercise. A forced movement will cause muscle tension and pull which can be felt through the fingertips. Instead, the eyes should open and close naturally with a smooth, fluid motion. Your head should be straight and erect, and the eyes directed straight ahead. Do not concentrate on looking straight ahead when the eyes are closed. This tends to force unnatural eye movements.
2. **Close.** The eyes should be closed slowly and gently, in a fluid motion, as if you were closing them to fall off to sleep. If you are relaxed, this should not be difficult to perform. The fingertips will detect any unwanted muscle tension. If tension is sensed, concentrate on “closing in slow motion” as if slowly falling asleep.
3. **Pause.** At the completion of the closure, pause for approximately a three count. This will allow the upper lid to close completely. Thus, you will begin to learn the feeling of complete closure of the eyelids. A “hidden movement” of the eyes during the pause will be appreciated, if the exercise is performed properly.
4. **Open.** Open slightly wider than normal. This should not be accented to the point of a wrinkled brow; open only slightly wider.
5. **Pause.** In the wide-open position pause for a moment.

## SUMMARY

This exercise should be performed regularly 15 times a day. Each practice period should consist of 10 correct blinks. This will require no more than 10 to 15 minutes per day. Within three to eight weeks your blinking habits should improve greatly and you should then drop to a maintenance program of five to six practice periods per day. You should make an effort to incorporate these exercise periods into your daily schedule, much the same as brushing your teeth. Progress evaluations of blinking are performed at the office visits when you will be advised if any changes are required to assist you in becoming a perfect blinker.

The exercises should be done with and without the contact lenses on, but should not be done in situations requiring concentrated attention such as reading or driving.

## THE IDEAL BLINK

If this program is followed, and you are faithful in your exercises, within a few weeks the partial, squinting blink will become a full, fluid, natural-appearing blink. For additional help, watch trained actors in movies or TV. Notice how and when they blink. In order to look attractive, one normally does not blink while looking directly at a person or when conversing with the person; rather, blinking is done while looking from side to side or from one object to another. Practice concentrating on blinking while changing direction of gaze. Learning to blink when changing direction of gaze will help in the development of a natural-appearing and beneficial blink.

The frequency of blinking varies from one person to another. However, for most persons a blink every four seconds is required. Learn to blink at approximately four-second intervals.

The rewards gained by correct blinking are sharp vision, improved eye health, reduced eye redness, and maximum comfort with contact lenses. Remember, correct blinking frequently makes the difference between success and failure with contact lenses.