

Contact Lens Malfunction?

Vision Problem Masks Stroke

Contact lenses don't usually go haywire overnight – but a body can. Exactly that happened not too long ago to a patient of Serge Wright, O.D.

The Sedona, Ariz. optometrist got a call one morning from a 65-year-old patient. Complaining of blurred vision and trouble judging distances, the man looked to his contact lenses as the cause. He wanted to come right in, and Dr. Wright wanted to see him right away, too.

Dr. Wright is a pro, with more than 33 years caring for patients. And, he knew right away that the eye exam could very easily show an underlying health problem. In fact, checking for clues into overall health is a big part of each and every eye exam an optometrist does.

Also, at the top of his mind, was the fact that contact lenses usually don't develop sudden problems that impact vision. The likely cause was something to be checked out right away. And good thing he did just that.

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When the patient came in later that day, Dr. Wright did a standard visual field screening test, and it didn't check out. So, he did a follow-up test to assess his patient's peripheral (side) vision.

“The test showed that the patient was missing one-fourth of his vision on the left side of each eye,” says Dr. Wright. “According to the test results, his problem wasn't really in his eyes or in his contact lenses. It was in his brain. The test indicated that he'd experienced a recent stroke in the area of the brain that controls vision – the visual cortex – and that the problems with his eyesight were actually occurring because of brain damage from the stroke.”

Stroke and high blood pressure go hand in hand, so Dr. Wright took his patient's blood pressure. “It was significantly elevated,” he recalls, “which told me that he might be susceptible to another, potentially fatal stroke at any time.”

With no time to waste, Dr. Wright connected with a medical doctor to see the patient right away. Soon after, medication was prescribed to reign in the man's sky-rocketing blood pressure.

“Fortunately, this patient's vision problems began to clear up within a few weeks, as his brain recovered from the stroke,” says Dr. Wright today. “His eyesight is just about back to normal now, and when he came in for his most recent yearly eye exam, he thanked me profusely for helping him uncover the underlying stroke that had caused his vision difficulties.

“This patient could have lost his life to another stroke. But it didn't happen. As an optometrist, you have to feel good about helping somebody in that situation!”