

## **Astigmatism in Singapore on the Rise**

### **Prevalent Ignorance calls for Public Education**

**16 January, 2009** – A three-year trend survey commissioned by Johnson & Johnson Vision Care from 2006 to 2008 has revealed that the reported incidence of astigmatism is on the rise in Singapore, affecting over 400,000 people. Despite that, research also shows that there still remains a prevalent, low-level of understanding on the condition.

The research, which examined both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of astigmatism, found that even though the overall incidence of vision problems in Singapore held steady at around 60% of the population, astigmatism, mostly combined with myopia was on the rise.

In 2006, of the 15 to 39 year olds who required some form of vision correction surveyed, 28% reported that they suffered from astigmatism. In 2008, the figure rose to 49%. All the other vision problems investigated- myopia, hyperopia and presbyopia showed slight decline.

The number of people in Singapore between the ages of 15 to 39 who required some form of vision correction stood at around 913,000 in 2008. With almost half of adults suffering from astigmatism, it meant that there were about 451,000 astigmatism sufferers in Singapore at that time.

On examining the level of understanding of people on astigmatism, it was found that there was a general low understanding of the condition with regards to its symptoms, causes, control and preventive measures. This contributed to low initial awareness of sufferers who detected that they had astigmatism only through eye-checks by their eye-care professionals.

Most astigmatism sufferers who wear contact lenses showed a lack of concern towards the condition and accepted the negative effects it had on their lives, many choosing to adapt with coping strategies instead of correcting the condition.

Cited examples from the research of the negative effects of astigmatism include blurred vision at all distances, poor night vision and “halo-lighting effect”, as well as inconveniences such as difficulties distinguishing road signs and bus numbers, as well as reading off reflective surfaces.

Such instances affected the lives of astigmatism sufferers especially in the arenas of work, commuting and night activities. This is especially true for those who chose to use coping strategies to deal with the condition, instead of correction, where they would deliberately avoid situations that would pose potential embarrassment or danger.

When attitudes towards correcting astigmatism were examined, it was found that most astigmatism sufferers had spectacles that were corrected for the condition. However when it came to contact lenses, many chose to simply use normal spherical contact lenses that corrected myopia, but with a higher prescription so as to “mask” the blur from astigmatism.

Such “masking” of astigmatism with higher prescription spherical contact lenses meant for normal myopia poses a risk in worsening existing refractive error conditions. However due to the general low understanding and awareness of astigmatism, coupled with consumers not knowing the level of eye care they should expect from their eye-care professionals, many have been given the readily available option of “masking”, and choose to do so, not knowing the full risks involved in this unhealthy practices.

“Johnson & Johnson aims to release research results so as to facilitate the education of the masses on this highly undetected and uncorrected problem here in Singapore.” Ms Bebe Teo, Country Manager for Johnson & Johnson said.

“In support of this primary objective we also hope to encourage people to take the initiative to get their eyes checked by an eye care professional, to know what’s expected of a qualified professional so that they can make informed decisions as a patient and equip themselves with the correct eye care product which meets their needs and lifestyle.” Ms Bebe Teo adds.

The rising problem of astigmatism should not be ignored as doing so could lead to negative effects affecting the large and growing number of Singaporeans; effects such as living a less-than-optimal quality of life , the worsening of their refractive problems and hindering the optimal development of the eye, especially in younger age groups. Education is therefore crucial not only for the current population, but also for the eyesight of the future generations to come.

**For more information on Astigmatism, please visit the Johnson & Johnson Astigmatism Education Site at [www.acuvue.com.sg/seeclearly](http://www.acuvue.com.sg/seeclearly)**

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**About Johnson & Johnson:**

Johnson & Johnson is a company committed to transforming the world's vision. Since the inception of the Vision Care division, they have strived to increase awareness of the importance of vision and vision care and to provide the world's most exceptional vision correction options. To that end, Johnson & Johnson's passion for innovation and unwavering commitment to the highest standards of quality has enabled them to become the world leader in vision care, providing a family of outstanding contact lens. Johnson & Johnson Vision Care vision is headquartered in Jacksonville, Florida. It is the maker of ACUVUE® Brand Contact Lenses, the world leader in soft disposable contact lenses.

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