

Foresight

For eye care professionals in the Health and Wellness Division

Issue #1 2020



Recovery by the Numbers

It's important to follow key metrics to gauge how your recovery is tracking



Dr. Phan

Julie Phan, OD, has the mindset of a business owner. She has a history of finding lucrative opportunities that others might pass over.

A case in point is her independent

practice inside a Sam's Club warehouse in San Bernardino, California. "It's a low-income community with a lot of patients on state assistance," she says. Yet she has been running her practice, Premier Eye Care Optometry, profitably and efficiently.

"I left an employed situation to take on this sublease because I saw the business opportunity," she says. "I could see that I had an opportunity to build it, and while financial success wasn't guaranteed, I felt like I could do it."

Filling a void

First, she realized that she would be filling a critical need in the community's health care. Some providers avoid patients on state or federal assistance, which can lead to deficiencies in health care access for these communities. "I care about these

patient populations. When I began my practice, I was determined to keep my focus on my patients and serving my community." She saw her practice as a calling.

Patients recognize that level of commitment. "They say, 'You treat me like family.' They are so accustomed to having four minutes of a health care professional's attention, and they really appreciate that we take time with them," she says.

Quality time spent with patients also results in return visits and word of mouth referrals—many of them covered by the patient's medical coverage. "If you have the energy and you care about the population, you can turn a location into a successful business," she says. She and her husband, **Toan Nguyen, OD,** who also have an independent practice together, visited family practitioners in the area, explaining their services, including providing eye exams for patients with diabetes. This area has a high percentage of patients with diabetes and also patients who have dry eye; both of these conditions bring patients in regularly for management of their chronic ocular conditions.

Now, they're seeing those patients every year—and for some co-management cases, more often than that. "The medical plan that most of these patients are covered through pays well for medically indicated services such as glaucoma management and diabetic retinal exams. These services are covered entirely by the medical plan, so patients have no disincentive to return for their next appointment. I tell them there's no cost to them." The specific Medicaid carrier that covers her region pays with no prior authorization, offset or HMO designations, so her paperwork is straightforward.

As careful as Dr. Phan is about numbers and tracking metrics now, that's a factor she didn't take into consideration when she first started the practice. "I was lucky to be in an area that has good state funding because not every Medicare plan is the same." She now advises ODs to take a careful look at the carrier's policies and reimbursement allowables because it is an important consideration.



Dr. Nguyen

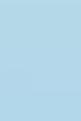
Expanding the patient base

In addition to serving lower-income patients, her area is also home to a lot of veterans and the Club is less than two miles from both the California University of Science and Medicine and Loma Linda University and hospital. "We see the medical students and residents every year until they graduate, and hospital and university employees are our patients, too."

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Building on Our Strength

Your Commitment to Care Is Exceptional

The last few months have been very different from what we originally expected. You have navigated a global pandemic and civil unrest in your communities, and you have learned new ways of working. You also have done it with a continued commitment to exceeding our patients' expectations that should really make you proud. We wanted to take a moment to say thank you.

Although this year has turned out a little different than we all expected, we look back at the goal we shared with you at the start of this year: to provide our patients with the absolute best care we can provide because it is by taking exceptional care of our patients that the word will spread and our customers will return.

This is exactly what you have all done—you have taken exceptional care of our patients at a time when they needed you the most—and you can be very proud of that.

Thank you all, again, for your continued commitment to providing the best care to our patients. It is because of this

commitment that we make a difference in the lives of so many people around the country.*



Cautiously Optimistic

OD restarts with safety precautions in abundance

COVID-19 struck the area around Lake Charles, Louisiana, hard. So **Rebecca Cronan, OD**, who has an independent practice in a Lake Charles Walmart location, has only recently returned to work, with limited hours and extra safety precautions.

If there's an upside to cautiously opening, it's that she has been able to hear from colleagues in other areas what works and what doesn't. "I'm feeling confident," she says. It helps that her patients do recognize the risks and understand the precautions that medical offices like hers take.

That slow approach makes her more confident for her own personal health, too. Her staff members know of her immunocompromised condition, so they will be gentle but firm advocates that all patients will be expected to wear their masks or reschedule for a later date.

She prepared with limited opening hours and a cap on the number of people, including staff and doctors, who could be in the space at the same time. Her practice space was remodeled in 2009, so it's fairly roomy—and even more so now that most of the chairs were removed from the reception area to ensure social distancing. The children's toys

were cleaned and packed away, too.

She also had some practice the time when she was seeing emergency and urgent care patients on how to do things like flip an eyelid while she was wearing gloves. That has made her confident that she can continue with new contact lens fits. She is ready to jump in if the patient needs help with insertion or removal and the staff is uncomfortable with that. "I think with our scheduling fewer patients per hour, we will still have time to accommodate insertion and removal for new contact lens patients," she says.



Dr. Cronan

A surprise opportunity

After Dr. Cronan graduated from Southern College of Optometry in 2001, she didn't have a practice modality or location

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Foresight

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Foresight is a publication for eye care professionals working inside a Walmart or Sam's Club.

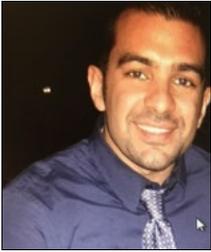
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Long Hours on the Computer and Staring at Devices Contribute to Eye Fatigue



Dr. Morshedi

As many Americans were driven inside their homes during coronavirus-related work-at-home orders, they are now spending even more hours per day on their computers and digital

devices to stay productive and connected. Not surprisingly, this can lead to symptoms of digital eye fatigue, says **Michael Morshedi, OD**, who has independent practices inside two Walmart stores in Louisville, Kentucky.

One way he addresses symptoms associated with digital eye fatigue is with the Biofinity Energys® lens from CooperVision. "It's designed specifically for people who are spending time on digital devices and computers," he says. "Most patients seem very pleased with the comfort of the lens and how it helps address eye dryness and tiredness from digital eye fatigue."

Biofinity Energys® is the first and only contact lens designed to help with eye

tiredness and dryness associated with digital eye fatigue.¹ It features a unique Digital Zone Optics® lens design, which helps with eye tiredness and can help

reduce ciliary muscle stress associated with digital device use.² In addition, digital device users blink 50 percent less while looking at

screens,³ but Aquaform® Technology helps with the dryness associated with digital eye fatigue. The lens design helps people's eyes better adapt so they can seamlessly and continuously shift focus between digital devices and offline activities.

He has seen the lens be effective in addressing the symptoms of digital eye fatigue as most patients spend some or part of their day using digital devices. CooperVision data supports his experience.

- About 90 percent of patients agree that Biofinity Energys® lenses help their eyes not feel strained.⁴
- 85 percent of these lens wearers agreed their eyes were relaxed when using digital devices.⁴
- 8-in-10 wearers said that Biofinity Energys® lenses help their eyes feel less tired at the end of the day compared to their previous contact lenses.⁵

Encourage a trial

Dr. Morshedi says that his practice have a high percentage of contact lenses. "There are so many patients here who have never tried contact lenses, so they're amazed when they actually have a chance to experience a contact lens. Having the Biofinity Energys® lens lets young professionals and students experience something new that can help their overall vision and comfort in today's modern world.

Dr. Morshedi also appreciates the Biofinity® material. He fits the full family of Biofinity® contact lenses, adding that the Biofinity® toric

lens is his favorite option in the toric category. "It has been tremendous for our business in the past decade. Contact lenses have had so many improvements since 2010 that we have a chance to tell all those patients who have never tried or haven't tried contact lenses in 10 years that they can wear contact lenses. They're overwhelmed by joy when we fit them," he says.

Now he can bring that level of amazement to even younger patients who have noticed that a long day on the computer leaves their eyes feeling tired. ✨

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What Is Digital Eye Fatigue?

One-in-three adults said they use screens 10+ hours a day⁶, and ocular discomfort associated with digital eye fatigue is felt after only two or more hours in front of a digital screen⁴. Symptoms of digital eye fatigue include the following.

Symptoms^{8,9,10,11,12}

Dry eyes	Difficulty focusing	Irritated eyes	Headache	Eyes that are slow to focus
Excessive tears	Blurred or double vision	Increased light sensitivity	Pain in neck, shoulders or back	Tiredness

Who Has it?^{9,11,12,13}

AS MANY AS 90% OF PEOPLE WHO WORK PRIMARILY ON COMPUTERS

8 in 10

14. YouGov European Eye Fatigue Report, 2016.

Recovery by the Numbers

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Dr. Phan says that at first, many of the Sam's Club customers weren't aware that the optical and optometry offices were there. But she quickly made it her mission to get online—and now it's common for patients to say that they found her on Yelp or Google with positive reviews driving patients into the practice. Connecting with students and being part of community health fairs and events have also helped her grow the patient base.

It's important to track metrics to measure your progress, she says. "We track our per-patient revenue, our daily revenue and our percentage of contact lenses. We've been looking at those numbers every day for the past five years," she says.

There's been significant growth in a number of areas: from 40 patients a month in the early days to 280 patients per month now. She's expanded doctor coverage from two days a week to five. And contact lens patients increased from 12 percent of the patient base to 35

percent now. Forty percent of her patients return to her year after year.

While routine care dropped off in March and April as the country responded to COVID-19, it's picking back up. The practice is seeing a renewed interest in contact lenses. "We now ask all of our patients if they want to talk to the doctor about contact lenses or LASIK consultations. So many people say yes because it makes it easier to wear a mask," she says. She anticipates that renewed interest in contact lenses will remain high.

Ultimately, Dr. Phan's entrepreneurial mindset has enabled her to establish a successful practice in an area that other optometrists might have passed over. By networking, leveraging a strong online presence and providing comprehensive care management, she has vastly improved her per-patient revenue, allowing her to spend more time with patients ensuring they receive the best possible care. By keeping the patient as the first priority, her practice has grown substantially. *

Presenting The Full Treatment Plan

Dr. Julie Phan trained her staff in how to present the full treatment plan, including her recommendation for contact lenses, so patients understand the complete picture. She finds it critical that that all patients understand exactly what is covered by their insurance so that they can make informed decisions regarding their health care. Even after five years, she role-plays with staff, allowing her to tweak her presentation and ensuring that staff feels

comfortable with explaining costs in a clear manner. "If they say, 'Well, your exam is \$ ___ and your eye drops are \$ ___,' patients feel like they're being sold extras. Instead, they can say, 'Your doctor prescribed contact lenses, eye drops and a heat mask for your dry eye and new eyeglasses.'" The staff can then explain the cost for the exam and any other services or products she offers, as well as insurance coverage.

The resulting higher per-patient revenue

that comes from managing medical issues, dry eye and contact lens fittings means that she can spend more time with the patients she has. "If you can double your per-patient revenue, you only need to see half as many patients. They'll be happier because of the time you spent with them and the education they received. If you're rushing, they feel like a number," she says. And she never wants her patients to feel like a number. *

Keeping the Heart in Mind

Discussion on ocular nutrition can help patients' ocular and overall health



Dr. Clemmons

For **Melonie Clemmons, OD**, the journey to educate herself and others on nutrition stems from a personal place. "I had always been pretty healthy, but when I had my child seven years ago, it triggered some autoimmune diseases," she says. "I would start a medication, and it would make me feel worse."

Frustrated with the options presented to her, Dr. Clemmons turned to nutrition. "I wondered how much our nutrition affects the eye," she says. When she found great personal success, "The diet changed my life and I needed to share that information."

There was no shortage of information on nutrition. One of the most compelling studies came from an Australian study that said that



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Respect Is a Love Language

Patients will appreciate doctors who treat them as individuals but understand the cultural influences



Dr. Ahmad

Learning to communicate begins in infancy, but what **Naheed Ahmad, OD**, who has an independent practice inside a Walmart near Atlanta, Georgia,

knows is that learning communication skills must continue throughout life. She found this especially applicable while in optometry school, where she observed that one thing that is hard to teach is *how* to talk to a patient. Dr. Ahmad does not simply mean explaining the science behind a product recommendation, for example, but ODs must know how to convey authority and trustworthiness even in nonverbal communication. Her desire to learn stems from growing up shy. She realized that by using certain nonverbal communication methods she was able to overcome her shyness.



"I break down nonverbal communication into different categories, such as appearance, speech patterns and posture," she says. "For example, when it comes to posture, make sure you lean in and make eye contact -- but not too much," she says, for example. She notes the value of how you shake someone's hand and how professionals present themselves. "There is power and authority in your appearance. Patients are going to look at how I present myself. If I wear flip flops, jeans and a t-shirt, I give up some of that authority."

She emphasizes the importance of retaining a patient's confidence by not second-guessing himself or herself in front of the patient. One of Dr. Ahmad's most

valuable practices is to narrate what she does during the exam. As a result of the explanations she provides, she says that many patients comment that she gives the best and most thorough exam they have ever received. "When you talk to patients, they feel like part of it. They get more information, and they feel like it is a better exam."

"There is power and authority in your appearance. Patients are going to look at how I present myself. If I wear flip flops, jeans and a t-shirt, I give up some of that authority."

Get to know the patients

Dr. Naheed, a past president of the American Association of Corporate Optometrists, will be speaking at this year's annual event, planned for November. Her presentation, *How to Improve Your Non-verbal Communication*, is only one of her interest areas. "In the past I have talked about cultural diversity and treating different ethnic groups." She primarily focuses on African-Americans, Muslims, Latinx people and people from East Asia. From her own life experience, Dr. Ahmad knows how to handle the subtle nuances that vary from culture to culture gracefully. "Sometimes when I have a female [Muslim] patient who brings their husband, he does all the talking," she says; even so, she'll continue to address the patient herself. According to Dr. Ahmad, if a male OD is treating a male Muslim patient, shaking hands is not an issue. However, if a male OD is treating a female Muslim patient who is wearing her hijab, the doctor should wait to follow the patient's lead on whether she wants to shake hands.

What she has found from her East Asian patients is the cultural practices in eye contact are different from the traditional American custom. For many of these patients, little eye contact is seen as a sign of respect, while in large parts of the American population, eye contact signals listening. "They also tend to be shy and

agree with what you're saying even if they don't understand," she says. For this, she recommends gently having the patient repeat back to you what they were told to make sure they understand.

For patients whose second language is English, Dr. Ahmad urges the practice of speaking more slowly—not louder. She doesn't use contractions and she makes sure if the patient is using a translator that she speaks and looks directly to the patient, not the translator.

Steer clear of stereotypes

Dr. Ahmad also urges fellow ODs and opticians to not make assumptions about a patient's finances based on race. For example, "Muslim women tend to feel ignored, when in fact the Muslim women as a population sector have one of the highest levels of education of female populations. Education is emphasized in the religion," she says. "Don't assume you know who they are. Look at reality—not the stereotype."

Similarly, don't prejudge a patient's willingness or ability to spend for needed eye care products and services based on what they're wearing, their accessories or their overall look. Recommend what the patient needs and if there's a price objection, present alternatives, she says.

"Don't assume you know who they are. Look at reality—not the stereotype."

To Dr. Ahmad, recognizing these cultural differences and finding ways to meet her patient's needs equitably is respectful and something she prides herself and her office on. She recalls a story from one of her technicians. "One of my techs used to work at another office where the doctor would treat Medicaid patients differently. They waited longer and received shorter exams. That tech was floored when coming here," she says. For Dr. Ahmad, learning about cultures and best practices is an act of service. "They are all deserving of my time and respect."*

Keeping the Heart in Mind

Continued from page 4

eating one orange a day reduces the risk of macular degeneration by 60 percent. Finding the interconnectedness of it all is part of what motivates Dr. Clemmons. "Everything is connected to your vascular health— your heart, brain and eyes," she says. "If people keep their blood pressure healthy, it can help prevent eye disease." She acknowledges the role of genes in heart and vascular health, but she maintains that "lifestyle trumps the hereditary."

Nutritional counseling

At Dr. Clemmons' independent practice inside a Walmart in Ellijay, Georgia, she has a different approach. "I don't want to treat your macular degeneration, I want to prevent it," she tells patients. What has proven to be an uphill battle is the multitude of perspectives presented to Americans on where the threshold for "healthy" lies. "What you can tell people is to focus on the basics... stay away from processed foods, for example."

In her research on ocular nutrition, Dr. Clemmons has found that the nutrients that aid the human body can be found in major food groups like healthy fats, colorful vegetables, and even down to individual spices. "Turmeric reduces inflammation. Ginger and cinnamon lower blood pressure," she says. "One thing most health experts can agree on is that anything that causes chronic inflammation in the body will cause chronic illness." She encourages patients to keep a piece of advice passed onto her: With every bite of food you take, you're either feeding disease or fighting it."

Practice makes perfect

The point of Dr. Clemmons ocular wellness center is to help patients improve their lifestyle. One thing she makes clear to them is that it is a no-judgment zone. "I'm not perfect, but what I tell patients is that



a little bit of anything is better than a lot of nothing. It's about their lifestyle over time."

When patients arrive at her practice, they are presented with a graphic, created by Dr. Clemmons herself, called the Nutrition Line. "Wherever people are, they can get better." The handout, which focuses on making wise choices, helps Dr. Clemmons emphasize that the more patients take care of their eyes, the more they take care of their hearts and brains, as well. "It's what I call a win-win-win!"*

Cautiously Optimistic

Continued from page 2

in mind. "I was open to being a corporate-affiliated OD, but I was looking at private practices, too. Mostly, I was anxious to get to work," she says. So Dr. Cronan became licensed in Louisiana and in Texas and worked in a corporate location in one and in private practices in the other. Soon after, she heard that a Walmart was opening right near her home. "It seemed like a good spot to be, and I thought I'd take it until one of the Texas practice locations became busy enough for full-time," she recalls.

But the Walmart was built in a growing part of town and got busier much faster than her other locations did. A few months after starting, she was asked to take over the contract for that location. It's been a great situation, she says.

It became an affordable way to build her own business. "I didn't have to make the investments in staff or inventory the way that a private practice does," she says. She also appreciates the flexibility in scheduling—both with being able to set aside time to take care of her own health needs and to enjoy attending her kids' school events. *



Feeling Less Alone as Part of a Larger Group of Colleagues

A Chicago OD and Walmart Independent Advisory Panel member for independent optometrists is finding support and reassurance



Dr. Landa-Geertz

Jennifer Landa-Geertz, OD, started as an independent OD practice owner inside a Walmart near Chicago, Illinois, nearly 20 years ago. At one time, she had three practice locations; for the past decade she has maintained two offices.

It's been a great career choice for her as she has built these practices and been part of the optometric community. When the coronavirus reared its ugly head and the recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the American Optometric Association came out, Dr. Geertz chose to close her practices to all but urgent and emergency care. While she still came into the office to address pressing issues, the three other doctors who work in her practices were not working in early April. They all have young children at home, and the doctors were encouraged to identify their own level of comfort with the decision, she says.

There for the patients in need

Many people—both in and out of the healthcare field—are feeling the stress from disruptions and uncertainty caused by COVID-19. This is an especially important time to go the extra mile for others, says Dr. Geertz.

"From the beginning, Walmart was focused on the health and safety of their associates, customers and optometric community."

For example, recently, she was taking advantage of her newfound free time, riding her Quarter horse, Scotch, when she received a message from a staff member. A distressed patient was worried about an increase in flashers and floaters. Dr. Geertz was able to be at her office in an hour to examine the patient and ensure

that it was not a serious retinal issue. The patient was so grateful for her presence and reassurance; between the ocular migraine he was experiencing and the recent stress of being laid off from his job, she was able to reassure him that he was not having an ocular emergency. "We have to remember that all this anxiety, concern and uncertainty about COVID-19 can affect our health in other ways. Fear can have physical manifestations on all the body's organs," Dr. Geertz says. In addition, the patients have fears about the virus and ocular

"We have to remember that all this anxiety, concern and uncertainty about COVID-19 can affect our health in other ways. Fear can have physical manifestations on all the body's organs."

complications such as conjunctivitis. Triage skills can be an essential part of caring for the community and potentially preventing unnecessary trips to the emergency room.

Calling for backup

According to Dr. Geertz, Walmart has been ready to adapt as well as be supportive as the situation unfolds. "From the beginning, Walmart was focused on the health and safety of their associates, customers and optometric community. When they reduced hours in their vision centers and focused on essential/emergency services only, they offered Vision Center associates the opportunity to continue to serve in essential areas like the pharmacy," she says. "Many have chosen to take that opportunity. They have been wearing their Vision Center white lab coats—which is generating questions and exposure and can help patients whose contact lens supplies are dwindling or whose prescription may have just expired. We are all helping in any way we can so they are not struggling with eyewear and eye care."

That kind of attention and willingness

to remove one more stressor from patients' daily lives is engendering good will. "We are making patients happy because we care." This happens to be her office moto: "See why caring is contagious," developed before the word contagious became such a scary word.

Part of a network

Dr. Geertz has served on the Walmart Advisory Board for Independent ODs since 2005, and being in that role when COVID-19 concerns erupted was reassuring. She had a chance to speak with colleagues in various places around the country, as well as her Walmart Health and Wellness contacts. They shared their own experiences and what they were hearing from doctors in their area. "It's good to be part of a community that knows Walmart is listening to them."

It's also good to have people with whom she can share recovery ideas. "I am confident and have positive feelings that things are going to get better. I look forward to working," she says, acknowledging that some aspects will be different. For example, initially, she plans to keep her patient volume down to one patient per half hour to limit exposure in the office area. "I have been thinking more about telemedicine and how that can work," she says. She did have

"I have been thinking more about telemedicine and how that can work."

one long-time patient send her a photo of a recurrent "style" so that she could visually observe the lesion and make sure it wasn't something different. "We did not have that option 10 years ago," she says, so she is curious to see what the applications for new technology might be in her practice in the future.

The way that eye care is delivered in the future will possibly change, she says, but her 20-year relationship with her patients and working inside a Walmart setting make her feel like she is ready for what comes next. *

Patients Want Reliable, Fast Relief for Ocular Allergies



Dr. Gutkovich

As the strictest restrictions of stay-at-home orders from the COVID-19 pandemic may be ending, more patients will be heading outside—just as ocular allergy triggers are abundant

in the Northeast, says **Dmitry Gutkovich, OD**, who has an independent practice inside a Walmart store in Islandia, New York.

He says that he is excited that PATADAY® and PATANOL® have both been converted

to over-the-counter (OTC) medications as PATADAY® Once Daily Relief and PATADAY® Twice Daily Relief. “PATADAY® is highly effective for eye allergy itch relief, so it has the proven track record. Now that it has become an OTC product, many people are familiar with the product; they are aware of its safety profile and its effectiveness,” he says.

Greater convenience at an accessible price

For many of his patients who are also customers at Walmart, affordability is a priority. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic that caused widespread furloughs, patients and customers were interested in finding eye care solutions that provided good value. “PATADAY® OTC will be available at an accessible price. When we’re in an environment where every dollar counts, having an effective OTC product is of great benefit to the provider and to the consumer,” he says.

The combination of convenience and accessibility as an OTC medication is a terrific

benefit. He can tell patients that PATADAY® Once Daily Relief, with one drop, will provide all day eye allergy itch relief. It features the same prescription strength formula you know and trust and it contains the #1 prescribed eye allergy itch relief ingredient.^{1,2}

“PATADAY® gives patients an OTC option that provides faster ocular itch relief in comparison to an allergy pill.”³



Wide applicability

The once-a-day dosing makes PATADAY® Once Daily Relief, an attractive option for all patients. “PATADAY® gives patients an OTC option that provides faster ocular itch relief in comparison to an allergy pill,” he says.³

Its long period of effectiveness makes PATADAY® an excellent option for contact lens patients, who can put a drop in their eyes 10 minutes before inserting their contact lenses. Both PATADAY® Once Daily Relief and PATADAY® Twice Daily Relief are approved for the pediatric population—children aged 2 and older—so even young children can use these products.

Carry OTC products in-office

Dr. Gutkovich has asked his Market Manager for PATADAY® to be available at the Vision Center for better patient convenience. A coupon can be provided for extra savings. “I expect to add PATADAY® to the collection of artificial tears and other OTC products we have available,” he says. *

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PATADAY® Once Daily Relief or PATADAY® Twice Daily Relief?



Once Daily Relief

With a higher concentration of olopatadine (0.2%), a single drop of Pataday Once Daily Relief works fast and lasts up to 16 hours. It was formerly prescribed as Pataday®.¹

[Ingredients, Usage and Safety](#)



Twice Daily Relief

At half the concentration (0.1% olopatadine), a drop of Pataday Twice Daily Relief provides up to 8 hours of fast, effective relief from allergy itch and redness. It was formerly prescribed as Patanol®.²

[Ingredients, Usage and Safety](#)

Both PATADAY® Once Daily Relief and PATADAY® Twice Daily Relief feature olopatadine, the #1 prescribed eye allergy itch relief active ingredient.^{1,2,3} PATADAY® Once Daily Relief has a higher concentration of olopatadine (0.2% olopatadine vs. PATADAY® Twice Daily Relief 0.1% olopatadine) providing longer-lasting eye allergy itch relief.

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