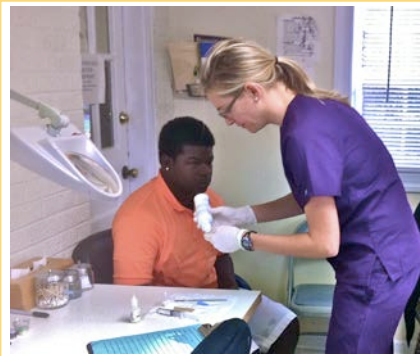




RED DOTS MEAN "THIS END UP!"

The prosthesis is shaped more like a curved contact than an "eye."

The days of one size fits all prostheses are long gone. Today ocularists custom match color and eye socket shape, resulting in a natural look. In one day, I was fitted with an artificial eye that slid right into my eye socket like a large contact. I try to have my prosthesis polished and checked annually. In the meantime, if I notice a buildup that dulls the surface, I drop my artificial eye in a glass of denture cleaner to restore its shine (dentures are made of the same type plastic as the prosthesis). During one particularly busy period of my middle school life, I went over 18 months without cleaning or removing my eye!



oc·u·lar·ist : noun
\\h-kyə-lə-rɪst\\:: one who makes and fits artificial eyes

A few years ago in August, I called Carolina Eye Prosthetics to make an appointment to have Patrick or Anna polish my eye prosthesis. The receptionist asked, "Luke, why did you wait so late in the summer to call? I'll try to fit you in, but we are just slammed with everyone trying to come in before school starts," I thought, "How many people are out there with a prosthetic eye in need of a polish?" That is the point: You wouldn't know-they look *that* good.



Above, ocularist Anna Boyd Jefferson works to achieve a perfect fit.

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Enucleation & Prosthesis: *A view through my eyes*



Luke reaches the summit of Mt. Whitney, CA.



"Nothing about enucleation or a prosthetic eye has prevented me from leading a full and active life."

Luke Hedrick, age 18



Luke's View

I was diagnosed with Coat's disease when I was 5. Soon after, I developed pressure buildup to such a painful degree that my eye had to be enucleated. My surgery was rather uneventful. The thought of enucleation is much worse than the reality. For me, the surgery was the answer to the end of horrific pain. When I awoke from the surgery, I never felt pain again.

After 6 weeks, I was fitted with a prosthetic eye that I have worn continually for more than a decade. I have competed on basketball, swim, and football teams and was ranked 1st in the state my entire senior year as a 160-lb. varsity wrestler. My eye has never fallen out or inhibited my athletic endeavors any more than being blind in one eye would. Honestly, I rarely think about it. I cannot feel my prosthetic eye at all.

Not one time has anyone ever asked if there was something wrong with my eye or looked at me like there was something that seemed unusual. People are always shocked when I tell them that one of my eyes is prosthetic. The only way anyone knows is when I tell them. When I was younger, new friends always asked me to take my "fake eye" out. My mom had a

rule that I could only take out my eye at home. It was always the same: my new friend acted so excited as he waited for me to remove my prosthesis, only to quickly become bored when all he saw was pink tissue like the inside of a cheek. I never let the fact that friends wanted to see what was different about me make me feel badly.

When you think about it, everyone has something that is different about them-or that they perceive as different. The most popular or best-looking girl or guy has insecurities that sometimes threaten to hold them back. I certainly have had my share, but my prosthetic eye was not one of them. In fact, it is what made me feel comfortable with my appearance, given the previous condition of my blind eye. If you need to undergo enucleation—do it. Allow an ocularist to fit you with a prosthetic eye. Don't let fear hold you back.

I am very thankful for a gifted surgeon like Dr. Freedman who ended my left eye pain and provided superior mobility. I am appreciative of my ocularists who crafted such a naturally fitting prosthetic eye. I am grateful for my health. My cup is half full. All in all, I am a lucky guy!

*"Can you see out of that fake eye?"
- and other questions often asked*

You are not wearing glasses in the photos. Do you wear them?

Yes, I wear glasses and you should also if you have sight in only one eye. We do not have a "spare" if an accident were to occur that compromised sight in our seeing eye. My football helmet had a built in shield. I do not wear glasses when I wrestle. However, in the other photos, my glasses merely were removed for the picture.

Was the fitting of the prosthetic eye painful?

No, not at all. The worst part of the day was waiting for pain! At the start of the appointment, the ocularist inserted a mold of the prosthesis to ensure a custom fit, but it did not hurt at all.

What is involved with the enucleation?

First, the blind eye is replaced with a coral implant by the surgeon. Schlera, or eye tissue, is placed over the implant and the eye muscles that move the eye are affixed. The porous nature of the coral allows growth and attachment of the tissue and muscles to the implant, equipping the eventual prosthesis to move naturally. This surgical technique that demands great skill is fascinating but you will miss it; you will be "out" while it all happens.